

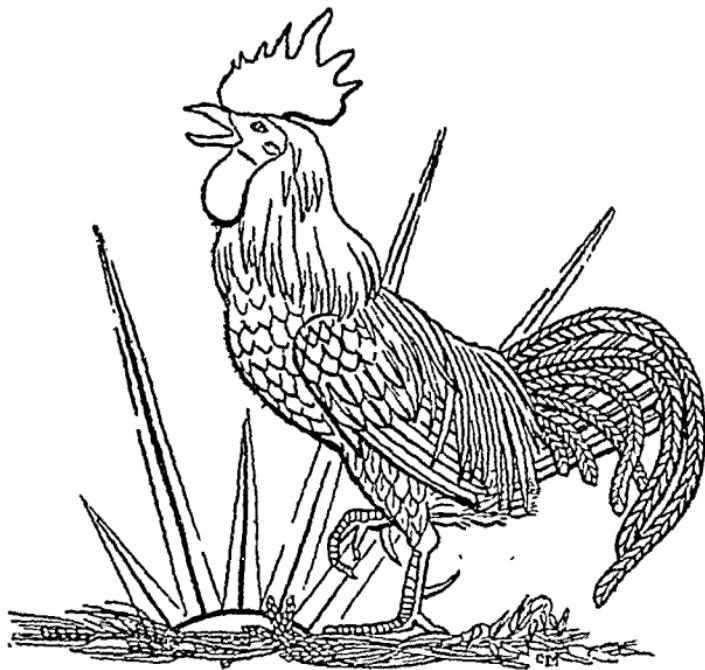
CHANTICLEER
A Study of the French Muse

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BY

J. G. LEGGE

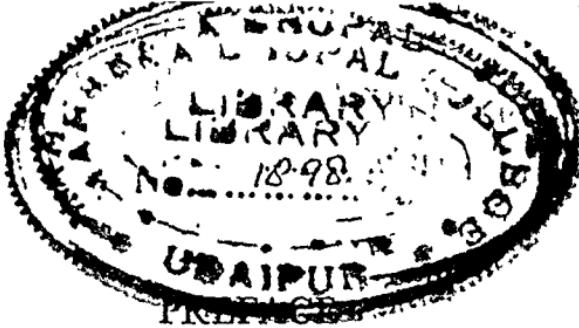


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TO THE MEMORY OF
A. D. C.
LOVED OF HIS FRIENDS
LOVED BETTER OF THE GODS



THERE are many in our country who have a fair knowledge of French, but the number of those who can appreciate French poetry, and who can, and do, read it with enjoyment is comparatively small. This book is the effort of one who has derived throughout his life intense enjoyment from this source to enlarge that circle by spreading the knowledge of the form and content, with all its varied charm, of French poetry as it pursues its course through ten centuries of European life and thought. The translation or paraphrase of French verse has attracted English poets and scholars all through the ages, and a collection of delightful poems in English, medieval, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Georgian, and modern, might be got together with which few of the versions in this book, except perhaps for literalness, might hope to compete.

But such an anthology would lack unity of purpose, while any anthology of translations from a foreign language must strike as somewhat cold and lifeless an Englishman ill-versed in the history of the country concerned, knowing little of its climate and natural conditions, its politics, its intellectual development, the changes in its social life, the sort of human beings these foreign poets were and are, and all the action and reaction between one influence and another that go to determine why a particular language took the form it has, and how its literature acquired the substance and shape it presents to a reader of alien origin. An elaborate introduction, if read, with an apparatus of notes and appendices, again if read, can do something, but not enough, to give the book warmth and colour.

When the present author, with this thought in his head, was gloomily contemplating some years ago a selection of his translations from the French, which had occupied him since undergraduate days, with long and lucid intervals during which he attended to his proper business, the idea occurred to him that he might do a useful piece of work if he made his translations, which he had taken infinite pains to keep close to the originals

not only in meaning but also in pattern, illustrations in the text of a succinct account of French poetry, chiefly lyrical, from its beginnings to the close of the nineteenth century. Such an account might, he thought, provide the necessary background for the English reader, especially if no opportunity was neglected of bringing into relation with one another the history and the social life of England and France, and of saying a word about each poet himself, so as to give, as it were, to each poem some sort of personality.

He little realized at the time how ambitious was his aim, and how difficult the task he had set himself. After wide and discursive reading for many years, with no set purpose to guide one, and no systematic taking of notes, one finds on sitting down to write how scanty is the supply of exact knowledge stored in one's head. However, he persevered, turned again to his books, and pursued his task for five long years, still working over his translations, with the result that he has produced a little book which he fondly hopes will not fail utterly of its purpose.

He has read much of French criticism, as subtle and as well-informed within its sphere as any in the world; and in committing himself to a judgment upon any author he has been shy of expressing any opinion for which he could find no French warrant. He has also read much of English criticism, and has hesitated before running counter to the views of its great masters. But a man must be permitted to exercise a certain independence. One generation of critics follows another, and too often ignores or sneers at its predecessor. We may safely hope to be excused from deferring too much to the last comer, for he may be regarded in a few years as no better than a Wild Ass stamping o'er some great hunter's head. The accepted critic of every age brings some contribution worth the appreciation of his successors.

The book is not intended as a school book. Nevertheless, as the author carries his mind back to his own later schooldays, he wishes that such a book as this, or such a book as he has tried to make this, had been placed in his hands when his mind was beginning actively to develop, so that he might have ranged over the whole field of a foreign literature and found perhaps some corner of it where he might like to browse on his own. What fun he would have had in fitting the translations into the originals,

and how much this pleasant pastime would have taught him in relief from continually plodding through set books with the help of a dictionary!

The author hopes that in the course of his book full acknowledgment is made of the debt he owes to others who have ranged over the fields he has been traversing, and on whom he has drawn. He is, like all Englishmen of his time; enormously indebted to Professor Saintsbury, and it gladdens him to remember that in his youth Walter Pater treated him as a friend. His first French guide in the way of books was *Les Poètes français*, published under the direction of M. Eugène Crépet as far back as 1861, a great work in its day. He was helped when he began specially to study the later poets of last century by Professor Yvon Eccles's *A Century of French Poets*. The *Oxford Book of French Verse* has been his constant companion since its publication in 1907, and the feel of two full and most scholarly French anthologies of French verse is very familiar to him, viz.: Ad. Van Bever and Paul Léautaud's *Poètes d'aujourd'hui*, and G. Walch's *Poètes français contemporains*.

He has from time to time consulted kind friends in Oxford, and among these he would like to mention Sir Edmund Chambers, Professor Ewert, Monsieur Berthon, and Mr. L. F. Powell. But above all he owes three special debts. The first is to Mr. E. A. Preece of the Alsop High School, Liverpool, and sometime of the universities of Bristol, Lille, and Strasbourg, who went through a draft of the book, queried this point or that, indicated gaps that had to be filled, and gave references to authorities that ought to be consulted, several of which proved to be invaluable. Then he has gained much from the opportunities afforded by that hive of modern language studies, the Taylorian Institution at Oxford. Finally, he shares with many others the incalculable debt owed to the Literary Supplement to *The Times*, which has now for over thirty years kept English readers in touch with what is new and important in the literature and literary criticism of the world outside our island.

A word must be added about the Appendix. This forms in itself a select little French anthology, for it is designed to contain the originals of all the poems translated. The author hopes that where copyright exists he has in all cases obtained the necessary authorization; any unintentional omission he will much regret.

CHANTICLEER

The following list indicates the copyright poems, and the owners who have kindly given permission for reprinting them:

- The *Mercure de France* for poems by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Henri de Régnier, Arthur Rimbaud, Albert Samain, Jean Moréas, Charles Guérin, Jules Laforgue, François Jammes, and Grégoire le Roy. The last-named poet has sent a cordial letter, expressing in too generous terms his appreciation of the translation of his poem which appears on p. 270.
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To conclude, the author has to thank (i) the Delegates of the Oxford University Press for permission to avail himself of a number of texts appearing in the *Oxford Book of French Verse*, and other works published by them; (ii) the Publishers' Reader, his own wife and one daughter for their great assistance in correcting proofs, and another daughter for the drawing of Chanticleer on the title-page.

17th August 1935.

J. G. LEGGE.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I. ORIGINS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD		I
II. LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD		34
III. THE RENAISSANCE		71
IV. THE AUGUSTAN AGE		100
V. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY		131
VI. THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT. PART I		159
VII. THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT. PART II		186
VIII. NEW DEPARTURES: BAUDELAIRE, THE PARNASSIANS, SYMBOLISM		203
IX. VERLAINE AND RIMBAUD, CORBIÈRE		234
X. THE AFTERMATH		252
APPENDIX, GIVING FRENCH TEXTS		271
INDEX OF FIRST LINES OF TRANSLATIONS		385
INDEX OF AUTHORS AND TITLES OF ANONYMOUS POEMS IN APPENDIX		389
GENERAL INDEX		391

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS AND EARLY MÉDIEVAL PERIOD

No modern literature possesses a poetic literature so vast in extent, so high in general quality, as French. Since the eleventh century its stream has flowed unceasingly until to-day. We may rightly boast the supremacy of our own poetic literature, with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats to represent us on the heights of Parnassus, not to mention a host of others only less distinguished than they. Italy has the great name of Dante towering above all names save that of Shakespeare, and in the last century and a half Germany may boast in Goethe a name above all modern names. But we have to remember that France had the start of us all, was supreme from the eleventh to near the end of the thirteenth century, and that, as Professor Saintsbury has asserted, 'for something like three hundred years England, Germany, Italy, and, more doubtfully and to a smaller extent, Spain were content for the most part to borrow the matter and the manner of their literary work from France.'

Moreover, if we claim in poetry the absolute supremacy for our own country, he would be a bold critic who claimed for the body of our prose literature superiority over, or even equality with, that of France. If, again, we take the Arts, and concede to Italy or to Holland the palm in painting, and to Germany in music, let it not be forgotten, as it too often is, that in what many regard as the greatest art of all, viz. architecture, France is supreme. Such monuments in stone as the French reared in their countless cathedrals, churches, and castles, from the eleventh even to the sixteenth century, with their enrichment in sculpture and coloured glass, are prodigies of human achievement which have, and have had, no rivals in the world.

The French language, like Italian and Spanish, is a daughter of Latin. But though any one with a fair knowledge of Latin can learn in a few weeks of close application to read both Italian

and Spanish without great difficulty, this is far from the case with French. France indeed was Romanized with comparative ease, both in language and in political and social institutions. The transformation was gradually accomplished from the south, and Aquitaine in the south-west, to north: the earlier penetration of Roman influence was naturally in the south, and there the ground was in a measure prepared for it by the yet earlier colonization of the Mediterranean coast, with Marseilles as the centre, by Greek settlers. The great Provençal poet of modern days, the handsome Frédéric Mistral, used laughingly to boast that he, like his comely neighbours, the people of Arles, owed his good looks to the fact that he came of Greek stock.

But however easily the Romanization of southern France took place, and though the vocabulary and grammatical structure of French may be almost entirely Latin, the perservid genius of the Celt, backed by the practical sense of a keen-witted trading and farming community in the south and south-west, so modified by well-recognized rules of linguistic development the words and grammatical forms of the mother-tongue as to make quite a new garment out of old materials. In the fifth century the decomposition of Latin was accelerated by the Germanic invasions that followed on the failure of Rome to maintain her hold over her vast empire. Nevertheless it took nearly a thousand years for the rustic Latin in popular use to develop into the language we call French.

The first stage was the formation of a Romance language, with actual Latin words and Latin features, but with an unmistakable French twist in it that points on to the language into which it was to develop. That this Romance language was firmly established in the seventh century is clearly shown by the appointment in that century of a bishop of Noyon expressly chosen because of his knowledge of it. But it should not be forgotten that, while a new language was in process of unconscious growth, the importance of literary culture asserted itself among courtiers and ecclesiastics and efforts were made to maintain the standard of Latin as the literary language, and to save it from the corruption of the colloquial language now gaining ground day by day.

In the eighth century a notable effort was made in this direction by one so august as Charlemagne himself, and the chief of his

instruments was Alcuin, an Englishman born and educated at York, to whom the emperor put himself and his family, his court, and indeed his empire, to school. Charlemagne had met him at Parma in 780, was impressed by him, and persuaded him to come to his court. In France he remained, though with two visits to his own country, until, as Abbot of St. Gregory of Tours, he died in 804. Alcuin did more for Charlemagne than act as his right hand in the revival of learning. He was more than a scholar and a theologian, he was a poet as well, as witness the lyrics by him quoted by Miss Waddell in her *Medieval Latin Lyrics*. And he did more as a poet than write lyrics, he did much to found the great legend that grew up round the name of Charlemagne; for, as M. Pauphilet has said: 'When Alcuin in the poems that he dedicates to Charles calls him David . . . he traces already the plan of the future legend . . . he indicates forever the two aspects under which the figure of Charlemagne will always be idealized: Biblical King and Roman Emperor.'

The Romance language had many dialectal variations, but the two main divisions of it were into what are called the *langue d'oc* in the south, and the *langue d'oïl* in the north. It would naturally be supposed that the first and main development of poetry, certainly of lyric poetry, would be in Provence, and the soft, luxurious, earlier civilized south, the home of the troubadours. As regards lyric poetry, though not epic verse, this was certainly the case. Each of the gay little courts of Provence was the centre of a pleasure-loving, highly cultivated society of women, as well as of men. The high position held by women helped indeed to develop the theory of *amour courtois*, or courtly love, the fine flower of Provençal invention which spread through civilized Europe, and did something to soften the manners of an age of feudalism. This courtly love was a theory of the ennobling virtue of a love so refined that it might even be regarded as incompatible with marriage, which constituted a science and a code of love, and gave to woman a dominating position.

Princes and knights and others of high degree vied with one another in the composition of the most elaborate songs of courtly love, in which they poured out their devotion to the lady of their ideal love. These songs of admirable art, and the theory of courtly love, captivated poets in Italy and the minnesingers of Germany, and spread to Spain and Portugal, northern France,

and through northern France to the English court. The most signal tribute to the importance of Provençal literature and its influence is paid by Dante, who quotes freely in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, the treatise by which he sought to establish Italian as a literary language, from the Provençal poets as exemplars, and among them from Bertrand de Born, Gérard de Borneil, Thibaut, Count of Champagne and King of Navarre, and Arnaut Daniel, whom Petrarch, following Dante, styled *gran maestro d'amor*. More than this, the relations of Dante to his Beatrice, and Petrarch to his Laura, are among the outstanding examples of the influence of the Provençal cult of courtly love.

Nevertheless, despite the brilliant success at the outset of the *langue d'oc* of Provence, it was the *langue d'oïl* of the hardy north, and particularly that dialect of it associated with the Île de France, the cradle of the kings of France, that ultimately prevailed. This could not be otherwise, for it was when, in 987, the French-speaking, French-thinking peers of France, brushing aside the claims of the last representative of the worn-out race of the great German emperor, Charlemagne, elected as their king Hugh Capet, Count of Paris and Duke of the Franks, that French history really began. Hugh Capet's small domain, a broad strip running from Orleans and Sens in the south to Abbeville in the north, was in the fullness of time by force of arms, by diplomacy and intrigue, and by profitable marriages, to absorb all the feudal possessions of his brother princes and create the France we know.

As for the south, the final blow that destroyed at once its political importance and its characteristic literary and social culture was dealt at the beginning of the thirteenth century by Pope Innocent III, when our English barons were in arms to wrest Magna Charta from King John. Against the heresies of the Albigenses the princes of the north were called on crusade—their leader Simon de Montfort, father of our own Simon de Montfort, who played his heroic part in the reign of Henry III. The crusade crushed the heretics, destroyed the independence of Toulouse, the seat of what was left of the earliest civilization in France, that of Aquitaine, and, as Braunschvig dryly remarks, ‘the victorious invaders established the Inquisition in the south: and that was the end of a meridional civilization.’

One of the few examples that survive of the Romance language

in real literary form is the charming poem known as the *Song of St. Eulalie*, which dates from about 880. St. Eulalie, born at Barcelona in 289, was martyred at Rome in 303, where she had dared to insult the pagan deities in the presence of the Roman praetor himself. The song was probably composed soon after the supposed discovery of the martyr's bones at Barcelona in 878. Here is an English version of it:

(1)

THE SONG OF ST. EULALIE

A damsel virtuous was Eulalie,
And fair of form, fairer in mind was she.
The enemies of God would vanquish her,
Would make her choose the devil, him to serve.
These evil counsellors she did despise,
Would have her God renounce who dwells on high;
Not gold or silver, and not jewels rare,
No royal threat of king, or urgent prayer,
Nothing could ever bend her to their will,
The child who needs must love God's service still.
And so before Maximian was she haled,
Who ruled the pagan people in those days.
He bade her do what she could not endure,
To wit, the name of Christian to abjure.
She summoned all her elemental strength;
Through tortures manifold she meekly went,
That she might keep her soul and body pure.
So died she honest and of good repute.
They cast her in the fire, soon to consume,
But being without sin she could not burn.
The pagan king this sign could not convert;
He bade them with a sword strike off her head.
Her cruel fate the maid did not resist;
Content to quit this world, she called on Christ.
In likeness of a dove to heaven she flew.
Now pray that she may deign to pray for us,
That to us all Christ may be merciful,
And after death receive us in his house,
As for his mercy's sake!

CHANTICLEER

In this version it will be noted that all the couplets are not strictly in rhyme; but all are in assonance, i.e. the final syllables of each couplet may or may not be in actual rhyme, but they always play upon the same vowel sound or some modification of it. Rhyme proper did not establish itself in French poetry for many a long year yet.

By the eleventh century France had at last a fully developed and separate literary language of its own. In that century began a vast output of epic and narrative verse that lasted for three hundred years, much of which, despite the continuous efforts of societies in which distinguished French scholars have enrolled themselves, remains still in manuscript. The mass of this epic literature will be briefly indicated by a list of the main divisions into which it may be classified, on the authority of the thirteenth century poet of Arras, Jean Bodel:

Ne sont que trois matières à nul homme entendant,
De France, de Bretagne et de Rome la grant.

I. The *Chansons de Geste*, epic poems recounting the exploits of Charlemagne and other French heroes. Of these the earliest and most famous is the *Song of Roland*; and it is in connection with this that we shall discuss the very interesting question of origins.

II. The Breton Romances, recounting the legends largely derived from Cornwall and Wales of King Arthur and his knights. Of these, which show the strength of the Celtic influence in France, the most authentic as in the epic vein are versions of the story of Tristan and Yseult by two Norman or Anglo-Norman poets, Béroul (1150) and Thomas (1170), both poems unfortunately incomplete. Of Thomas's poem translations into several European languages were made, and the German one by Gottfrid of Strasburg was a source drawn on by Wagner for his famous music-drama *Tristan und Isolde*. In a more artificial vein the easy, fluent, graceful *Chrétien de Troyes*, most admired of twelfth-century poets, did much to popularize these Celtic legends, and of his *Charette* we shall have a word to say later. In his *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante refers to the 'exquisite legends of King Arthur,' and twice in his great poem he touches on the love of Lancelot and Guenevere.

III. Romances of Antiquity, covered by Jean Bodel's *matière de Rome la grant*. Of these the outstanding ones are (i) the *Romance of Alexander*, which extends to 20,000 lines of twelve syllables each (whence the name of the most characteristic French line, the Alexandrine), and (ii) the *Romance of Troy*, with about 30,000 lines in eight-syllable verse.

Out of all this mass of epic and narrative verse let us dwell for a few moments on the first and greatest of them all, the *Song of Roland*. The author of it is unknown, but he was almost without doubt a Norman, and the precise date of it is unknown, though it is to be accepted as a work of the eleventh century, and probably of the last quarter of it. The earliest manuscript of it, generally accepted as the most reliable text that exists, was written by an Anglo-Norman scribe in the twelfth century, and is one of the treasures of the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

The poem, which extends to over 4,000 lines, and is written in stanzas of ten-syllable verse, each stanza in assonance, gives a long account of the catastrophe which occurred during a supposed crusade of Charlemagne against the Saracens of Spain, viz. the tragic end of the heroic defence by Charlemagne's rearguard under the command of his nephew, Roland, of the Pass or Roncevaux, perhaps the most romantic name in all legendary history. Roland, with all his peers, his friend Oliver, the fighting Archbishop Turpin and the rest, perished in the desperate struggle against overwhelming odds; but Roland himself, the last survivor, when mortally wounded, spent his last breath in blowing such a blast on his ivory horn to recall Charlemagne from his onward march, as put the Saracens to flight, and brought down on their heads the dire vengeance of the king, and on the traitor Ganelon, who laid the trap for Roland, his well-merited end.

The *Song of Roland* is no work of the high poetic quality of Homer's *Iliad*, that swells and subsides like the ocean itself, or of Virgil's *Aeneid*, with its easy flowing grace and vigour, high solemnity, and mingled notes of great endeavour, manly courage, and the passion and the pathos at the heart of human life. But its rude stanzas, almost childlike simplicity, sledge-hammer blows of direct appeal to the emotions, with here and there a picturesque touch or a note of wild lament, give it a real greatness of its own. The debates both among the Saracen emirs and

between Charles and his peers are dramatic enough, the characters of the great king and Roland and Oliver, Archbishop Turpin, and the traitor Ganelon are finely drawn. Wonderfully true to life is the description of the quarrel between Roland and Oliver, pathetic the death scenes, strange and terrible the account of the end of Ganelon, whom most of the peers of France are for pardoning, since Roland is dead, and neither gold nor vengeance on the repentant traitor will buy back his life. But after the ordeal of combat between two of them, in which Ganelon's sponsor is killed, his death is determined upon. Bound hands and feet to four horses he is torn in pieces, and his thirty hostages are hanged on a tree. No horror of the awful scene is spared; indeed, the anatomical details of all the death scenes in the poem are a feature of it.

But the poem is not so bleak and bare as sometimes described. Picturesque touches abound, and the poet revels in the sunlight. Here is the romantic description of the Saracen emir's fleet at sea:

En sum cez maz e en cez haltes vernes
 Asez i ad carbuncles e lanternes ;
 La sus amunt pargetent tel luiserne
 Par la noit la mer en est plus bele,
 E cum il vienent en Espaigne la tere,
 Tut li païs en reluist e esclairet.

At the mast-head and on the prows on high
 Hang lanterns and carbuncles¹ plenteously ;
 Which from above cast forward such a light
 As makes the sea more beautiful by night,
 And when against the Spanish coast they ride
 The country all around is clear and bright.

When Roland gazes on Durandal, his sword, he exclaims :

E ! Durandal, cum es bele e clere e blanche !
 Cuntre soleill si luises e reflambes !

Ah, Durandal, how burnisht, white and fair !
 Against the sun how dost thou flash and flame !

¹ The carbuncle, garnet, or ruby was supposed to glow in the dark.

The rising sun strikes the army:

Esclargiz est li vespres e li jurz.
 Cuntrc le soleil reluisent cil adub,
 Osbercs e helmes i getent grant flabur,
 E cil escuz, ki ben sunt peinz a flurs,
 E cil espiez, cil oret gunfanun.

Night clears away, clearer the daylight grows.
 Against the sun flash weapons all arow,
 Flames on the hauberks and the helmets glow,
 On shields with all their painted flowers, also,
 On lances and on pennons gay with gold.

But the next stanza opens sombrely:

Halt sunt li pui e tenebrus e grant,
 Li val parfunt e les ewes curant.

Massive the mountains, shadowy and high,
 Deep are the valleys, and the torrents swift.

When the great archbishop, after prodigies of valour, yields up his life, the poet exclaims:

Par granz batailles e par mult bels sermons
 Cuntre paiens fut tuz tens campiuns.

By doughty deeds and sermons eloquent
 Against the pagans champion aye was he.

And Roland cries:

E ! gentilz hom, chevaler de bon airc,
 Hoi te cumant al Glorijs celeste.
 Jamais n'ert hume plus volenters le serve.
 Dès les apostles ne fut hom tel prophete
 Pur lei tenir e pur humes atraire.

Ah, gentleman, knight of a noble line,
 I yield thee to the Glorious One on high.
 Never will man serve Him more cheerfully.
 Since the apostles has no prophet risen
 So strong in faith, so apt men's hearts to win.

The following versions of two of the best-known passages in the poem will give a fuller indication of its character. The first is taken from the long-drawn-out agony of Roland's death:

(2)

THE DEATH OF ROLAND

When Roland feels his sight is going fast,
 He rises to his feet as best he can ;
 His face has lost the colour that it had.
 A stone of colour brown before him lay.
 Thereat he strikes ten blows in grief and rage ;
 The steel grates, but it breaks not, nor is scarred.
 'Ah !' cries the count, 'St. Mary to mine aid !'
 Ah ! my good Durendal, on you 'tis hard ;
 Now that I die, for you I 've no more care.
 Through you how many battles have I gained,
 And what great kingdoms in the dust have laid,
 That Charles, he of the long white beard, now sways !
 May no man claim you with a coward's heart !
 Ne'er will there be your like in holy France.'

Count Roland feels that death has got him now :
 From head unto the heart death creepeth down.
 Then underneath a pine apace he goes,
 And on the turf face forward lays him down ;
 Neath him he places sword and ivory horn.
 He turns his head to face the pagan folk :
 This has he done because his will was strong
 That Charles may say, and with him all his host,
 He died, the gentle count, with victory won.
 Feebly and oft he doth his faults recount,
 And for his sins holds out his glove to God.

There lies Count Roland underneath a pine ;
 Spain-ward to turn his face has been his will.
 Of many things the memory comes to him,
 Of all the realms he won, like conquering king,
 Of his sweet France, of all his kith and kin,
 Of Charlemagne, his lord, who nurtured him.

At thought of these he can but weep and sigh.
 But of himself he must take reckoning,
 And, praying God for grace, recounts his sins :
 'Father of truth, the One who never lies,
 Who from the dead bade Lazarus arise,
 And Daniel in the lions' den bestrid,
 Save Thou my soul from fearful penalties
 For sins I have committed in my life !'
 His right-hand glove to God he lifteth high,
 Which from his hand St. Gabriel receives.
 Upon his arm he holds his head inclined,
 And with hands joined is gone his end to win.
 God sends to him his angel Cherubin,
 [St. Raphael] and St. Michael du Péril ;
 St. Gabriel, to join them, comes thereby.
 They bear the count's soul up to Paradise.

The second is the brief, naive, and yet touching account of the death of Aude, Roland's betrothed, and sister of Oliver, his friend, when Charlemagne returns to France after avenging the hero, and tells her of his death :

(3)

THE DEATH OF AUDE

The emperor is home again from Spain,
 And comes to Aix his fairest seat in France.
 He mounts the palace steps, enters the hall.
 There comes before him Aude, that lady fair.
 'Where 's Roland, the great captain ?' so she says,
 'That he would take me for his wife he swore.'
 Thereat was Charles beset with grief and pain ;
 His eyes shed tears, he grips his long white beard :
 'Sister, dear friend, of one now dead you ask.
 For him I 'll give to you noble exchange :
 Louis it is, nor better can I name.
 He is my son, and will my marches have.'
 Aude answers : 'What you say to me is strange.
 God grant not, nor his angels, nor his saints,
 That after Roland living I remain !'

CHANTICLEER

Her colour flies, at Charles's feet she falls,
And straightway dies. May Christ receive her soul!
For her they weep and mourn, the peers of France.

So Aude the fair unto her end has gone.
The king imagines that she has but swooned;
He pities her and weeps, the emperor.
He takes her hands to raise her from the ground;
Back on her shoulders, see, her head sinks down.
When Charles is ware she's dead whom now he holds
Straightway four countesses he summons forth:
Unto a nunnery her body's borne;
All night they watch by her until the morn.
Fair burial by an altar they bestow.
To her the king much and great honour showed.

Now, the slender historical basis for this great national epic is the massacre in 778 of the rearguard of Charlemagne's army by the Basques on his return from an expedition of doubtful success into Spain, an expedition undertaken possibly on the invitation of one of two rival Saracen factions in Spain. Legend must have been at work to provide the poet of the *Song of Roland* with the rich detail of his poem, which makes the catastrophe an episode in a Holy War or crusade, converts the Basques into Saracens, makes a venerable figure, with a beard like Aaron's, of Charlemagne aged but thirty-six in 778, and describes as living in that year Ogier already dead, Ganelon and Girard de Roussillon, who belong to the ninth century, and Joffroy d'Anjou and Richard of Normandy who belong to the tenth century, and even includes among Roland's conquests with the help of his trusty sword, Durendal, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales!

How the legend arose is still the subject of debate. The original theory was that the poem was strung together, much like the *Iliad* on the Wolfian hypothesis, out of the popular songs or lays recited by minstrels and embodying legends of Germanic origin, dating back possibly to the mists of antiquity. But another theory has been widely popular since it was developed with infinite skill and research, and most eloquently expounded by that artist in scholarship, M. J. Bédier.

The period during which the national epics were incubated,

and towards the end of which they made their appearance, viz. the tenth and eleventh centuries, was one of great political and religious movement, the end of the Carolingian empire, the great age of church-building, and of pilgrimages to famous shrines, furnished with sacred relics calling for adoration, pilgrimages culminating at the close of the eleventh century in the first crusade. The pilgrim routes were punctuated with sanctuaries, each with its complement of clerics anxious to co-operate with the *jongleurs*, or minstrels, who enlivened the pilgrims on their way by exploiting the sanctity, and the treasures of each particular shrine. And so, according to M. Bédier's ingenious and well-worked-out scheme, each shrine became the seed-bed of legend, or, in other words, the shrine preceded the legend.

Roncevaux was on the route to one of the most famous of all shrines, that of St. James of Compostella at Santiago, and so Roncevaux and the stages approaching it became the centres of legend about the great battle of 15th August 778, and the majestic figure of Charlemange and his supposed nephew, Roland, the hero of the disastrous day.

Recently, however, more than one scholar,¹ reverting in a measure to the first theory, has taken the view that legend long preceded the shrine, and has adduced arguments, not less cogent than those of M. Bédier, for believing that the poet of the *Chanson de Roland* worked upon songs, ballads, or earlier and ruder experiments in epic, whether orally transmitted or recorded in lost Latin or Romance script, all connected with the vast legend that grew up round Charlemagne. The poet, selecting or only interested in the episode of Roland, built up out of these earlier materials his masterpiece. Of these primitive sources none remain, but, if we may believe William of Malmesbury and Wace, verses from among them were chanted before the battle of Hastings, nigh three hundred years after Roncevaux, to hearten the knighthood of Normandy. As to origins, therefore, the doctors disagree, and the debate will still go on.

The *Song of Roland* and the other great national epics were composed no doubt for the delectation of castle and hall, but early appeared imitations or travesties of them, evidently designed

¹ See M. R. Fawtier's *La Chanson de Roland*, 1933; also M. A. Pauphilet in *Romania*, 234, April 1933. The author owes these two references to his daughter, Miss M. D. Legge.

to reach a popular audience. The *Song of Roland* was followed by a short epic, the *Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, recounting his fantastic adventures and grotesque diversions on his way to Jerusalem, and on his return by way of Constantinople, neither of which places he ever visited. Both Gaston Paris and Bédier see in this poem a vein of parody, which show that a jovial and prosperous middle class was now to be catered for by way of literary entertainment, as well as princes, nobles, knights, their womenkind, and their retinues. The *Pilgrimage* was undoubtedly the joint invention of clerics and minstrels, composed to tickle the fancy of the vast crowds who flocked to the great summer fair at Saint-Denis, whose abbey was a treasure-house of relics.

Similarly it is difficult, in connection with the Breton romances, not to detect a note of comedy in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier à la Charette*. It is true that Chrétien began this poem at the instance of Marie de Champagne, like her mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, a great upholder of the cult of courtly love. But here we have vividly displayed the extravagances of that artificial cult. We are told how Lancelot placed himself in such absolute subjection to his lady-love that he was ready not only to face any danger, but also to submit to any indignity in her behalf. When Guenevere is carried off, and Lancelot in pursuit of her loses his horse, he defies all laws of chivalry, mounts a cart driven by a dwarf to continue his journey, and endures the scoffs and sneers of all who see him installed in what was for one of his high degree a travelling pillory. And he is made to suffer even worse indignities for his lady's sake until he finally rescues her.

All this must have amused a wider circle than that immediately surrounding Marie de Champagne and her noble friends. A wider circle too than the immediate court of Henry II and Eleanor in England must have welcomed with enthusiasm the poems of Marie de France, a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes and his rival in popularity. This Frenchwoman domiciled in England dedicated¹ her versions of Breton legend, whether derived from Brittany, Cornwall, or Wales, to Eleanor's husband, Henry II, as, in all probability, she did the Fables she also wrote to William, Earl of Salisbury, Henry's son by Fair Rosamund.

Space fails to do justice to the charm and importance of her

¹ See M. J. Bédier in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 1891.

poetry. Suffice it to say that in her simple style she wrote her poems to be *read* by the closely watched, high-born ladies of her time, immured within their castle walls, and wearing out as best they could their time in the absence of their lords by the indulgence of their amorous fancies; for the love that was the burden of her lays was not the courtly love of the knightly troubadours with all its artifice and etiquette, but the passionate love that throbs through the great Provençal *alba*, to be quoted later, a love that absolves from all moral and conventional restraint those well enough born, and handsome, brave, or beautiful enough to claim its privileges, a love which, however apparently illicit, however crude, however cruel in its manifestations, is condoned by a Church that could only exist in fairyland. It was in the Breton tales that she found and gave out to the world of her time the element of the fairy tale with fairy women, nightingales, goshawks, swans, white hinds, and were-wolves, weird and mysterious, now terrifying, now enchanting, which has ever since afforded one of the resources of idyllic poetry.

Here are ten lovely lines from her *Lai du Chievrefoil*, where she tells how Tristram, hiding in a wood on the way to Tintagel, schemes to guide Yseult to him by placing in her path a branch of hazel split in two with his name carved on either face. Thus he tells his parable of the Woodbine and the Hazel:

Cume del chievrefoil esteit
 Ki a la coldre se pernct:
 Quant il est si laciez e pris
 E tuz entur le fust s'est mis,
 Ensemble poeent bien durer;
 Mes ki puis les vuelt desevrer,
 La coldre muert hastivement
 E li chievrefoilz ensement.
 'Bele amic, si cst de nus:
 Ne vus sanz mei ne jco sanz vus!'

As with the woodbine must it be
 That reaches for the hazel-tree:
 When as the tree is close embraced
 And round a branch the flower enlaced,
 Long may they flourish, two in one.

But, torn apart, they're soon fordone,
 The hazel fadeth soon away
 The woodbine dies the self-same day;
 Even so, fair friend, lost should we be,
 Thou without me, I without thee.

It is not extravagant to claim that since Marie de France no poet has told his tale with more economy and with more simple, unaffected grace. And worth noting, as a sign of her widespread and well-merited popularity, is the fact that early in the fourteenth century appeared a Middle English translation of one of her poems, *Le Fraisne*, or *The Ash-tree*, which tells the story of twin sisters, one of whom is married by the Archbishop of Dol to some noble lord, who for years has been living with her sister in ignorance of their relationship. The discovery is made on the night of the wedding, and next day the complacent archbishop dissolves the first marriage, and unites in a second marriage the rightful pair.

As education spread a mass of popular literature soon made its appearance, some of it supposedly instructive, some moralizing, some satirical, and some with an element of coarse humour. There are the *Bestiaries*, moralizing treatises on beasts. There are the *Romances of Reynard the Fox*, examples of that form of literature which has persisted throughout the ages, the fable with animal characters. Famous has always been the cunning of the fox, to which the finest tribute was paid in the eighteenth century by the greatest of all German poets, Goethe himself, in his *Reineke Fuchs*, which it is worth while learning German in order to read. There are the *Fabliaux*, depicting most realistically racy scenes in the life of the ordinary folk of the time; they are spicy enough, and the frequency with which a priest is the butt shows, like the later portion of the *Romance of the Rose*, of which we speak in the next chapter, that all was not simple piety in what has been called the age of faith.

It has not been possible in discussing, however briefly, the origins of French poetry, and its sources from northern as well as southern France, to leave out of account the great mass of epic and narrative verse. But the way is now clear to approach what comes more closely within the proper compass of this book, viz. a brief study of the lyrical and other verse that make up the

corpus of the shorter poems of France. French lyric poetry makes its appearance in the twelfth century, and becomes fairly plentiful in the thirteenth. How far back this takes us in the history of our own country will be realized if we recall the fact that these two centuries cover the period between the accession of Henry I almost to the close of the reign of Edward I.

A personage of peculiar interest in connection with the poetical development of the period was Eleanor of Aquitaine, who, after her divorce from Louis VII of France, became the wife of our Henry II. Henry already possessed Anjou, Touraine, Maine, and Normandy, and his marriage with Eleanor added Poitou and Guienne to the vast French domains of the English king. Eleanor, as Gaston Paris tells us, was a lady of lively and poetic temperament, and she nursed the cult of *l'amour courtois*, courtly love, and the poetry which embodied it in the courts of France and England, as did her daughters in their smaller circles at Rheims and Blois. We have already described this theory of courtly love, and indicated its place of origin in Provence, the home of the troubadours. But, thanks to Eleanor's interest, the torch was soon handed by the troubadours of the south to the trouvères of the north, and many of the examples of early lyric that have survived come from the more northerly portion of what we now know as France.

This early literature lay neglected for centuries, and indeed it was not until well on in the nineteenth century that scholars began to show some interest in the mass of rare old manuscripts buried in continental libraries, public or private. Germans were early at work, e.g. Karl Bartsch of Heidelberg; and the most distinguished of French pioneers, Gaston Paris, roundly reproached his fellow-countrymen for their neglect of the treasures of their own literary past, a neglect he was himself, with a crowd of scholarly followers, prominent among them Mario Roques, nobly to redeem. The result has been that the patient work of the last seventy or eighty years has opened out a fascinating new field to lovers of poetry, and the most attractive introduction to it known to the present writer is to be found in Sir E. K. Chambers's essay¹ on *Some Aspects of Medieval Literature*, included in Chambers and Sidgwick's *Early English Lyrics*, published by A. H. Bullen in 1907.

¹ Reprinted in his *Sir Thomas Wyatt and Other Studies*, 1934.

During the last few years an added impetus has been given to this comparatively new study by the enchanting works of Miss Helen Waddell, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* and *The Wandering Scholars*. In the former book she gives one cause to realize how much the early French lyric owed to medieval Latin lyric, and carries the source of the latter back even beyond Ausonius, the silver Latin poet, whose verse at times has the modern feeling commonly called 'romantic' as opposed to 'classic,' to the classical age itself. Those who care to follow their exploration of sources a few centuries further back will not do amiss to read a fine, old-fashioned, early Victorian piece of scholarship, now forgotten by most, Macaulay's introduction to his *Lays of Ancient Rome*. In *The Wandering Scholars* Miss Waddell tells the story of how these *vagantes*, despite the ecclesiastical training of most of them, carried on, and spread abroad in their wanderings, the passionate and secular and very human tradition of pagan times. Versions of a few examples of these early French lyrics will be found later in this chapter. But those who wish to roam more at large among them may be invited to turn to the fine translations in Mr. Abbott's *Early French Medieval Lyrics*, recently published by Constable, a book which has much of the charm of Miss Waddell's *Medieval Latin Lyrics*. In French the pleasant guides to seek are M. A. Jeanroy's *Origines de la Poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, and his two recently published volumes, *La Poésie lyrique des Troubadours*.

Admittedly the *chansons courtois*, among whose authors were not only nobles and knights, but even anointed kings, such as our Richard I and Thibaut, King of Navarre, were not written for a popular audience; but for very restricted and courtly circles, by authors well skilled in the arts of writing and composition. A favourite pastime at the Provençal courts and the courts of ^{the late} Eleanor and the feudal nobility of her time was what has been ^{seen} in the ^{name} songs of the most highly sophisticated kind

It has not been ^{age}, pours out his praises of the liege lady to origins of French ^{pe} vowed, from whom he can hope for no favour as southern France, ^{whom} he must maintain a plaintive, tearful epic and narrative ^{This fine amour or amour courtois,} though the what comes more close^{est} love that has permeated literature up to viz. a brief study of the ^{just} have soon become in itself little more

than a literary convention, co-existing, as in Petrarch's case, with a physical love of a more robust nature. Queen Eleanor herself can have been no prude, and how pitiless she was, according to legend, to her second husband's light-of-love, fair Rosamund!

It has to be confessed that many of the *chansons courtois* are stilted and artificial to a degree. But here is the version of one by Richart de Semilli of Paris, a poet of the twelfth century, with a real lilt to it, and no more exaggeration of sentiment than was admitted to nineteenth-century verse. The version, though written in a simpler metre than the original, endeavours to preserve its pattern:

(4)

A SONG

'Tis love will set me singing,
 My fair one's praise to tell,
I 'm off in all abandon
 To serve and love her well.
Much has she made me suffer,
 No gleam of hope will show,
'Tis only scorn she offers;
 Alas, I 've loved her so!
Lady, how happy will it be,
 The day your love is given to me.

I 've never loved another
 Save her for whom I sing,
And, well I know, none other
 Such love again will bring.
Sweet one I prize so dearly,
 You know that, for your part,
Soon as your heart it pleases
 Will cease my bitter smart.
Lady, long since I 've urged my plea;
 When will your love be given to me?

My lady, richly dowered,
 A word within your ear:
Though high may be your value,
 Of pride God keep you clear!

CHANTICLEER

Accost with kindly greeting
 All men both great and small;
 You will not always find us
 So instant in our call.
 Lady, who holds my heart in fee,
 When will your love be given to me?

If you have years in plenty,
 For you will come a day
 When old age lies in waiting,
 And all will hear you say:
 'Alas, how I was foolish,
 Who loved not in my prime
 When many lovers sought me,—
 The scorn of all in time!'
 Lady, loved in all loyalty,
 When will your love be given to me?

Go, song, and to that beauty,
 The radiant-featured, fly,
 And bear to her this message:
 For love of her I die.
 Since I can bear no longer
 The grief that loads my breath,
 Nor can I hope for healing
 While she approves my death.
 Lady I love whole-heartedly,
 When will your love be given to me?

But the *chansons courtois* are far from exhausting the resources of early French lyric. Many of the troubadours, and of the most highly placed, wrote also satirical verses with a political trend, and even lampoons of a personal character. There is besides seems to have of a more popular character, some indeed which we have to be the dew of the morning upon it. Nevertheless Professor Ker, careful in claiming close contact with folk-song. own early literature,¹ has pointed out that 'the distinction between popular and cultivated lyric is not always easy to make

¹ English Literature: Medieval, Home University Library.

out, as any one may recognize who thinks of the songs of Burns and attempts to distinguish what is popular in them from what is consciously artistic.' The classic instance in English is the famous lyric with which the *Oxford Book of English Verse* opens:

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cucu!
Growtheth sed, and bloweth med,
And springth the wude nu—
Sing cucu!

Nothing could sound more like the spontaneous outburst of a simple, native poet. But the original manuscript shows that the song was written to music, and the music is given—music regarded by musicians as very learned music indeed. Latin words as well as English are given, and the careful directions laid down for singing the music are in Latin. The song is therefore one of studied art, and the general conclusion reached by Professor Ker is that perhaps 'all popular poetry in Europe, at any rate for the last thousand years, is derived from poetry more or less learned in character, or, like the cuckoo song, from more or less learned music.'

Professor Ker goes on to suggest that 'the first popular songs of the modern world were the hymns of St. Ambrose, and the oldest fashion of popular tunes is derived from the music of the Church.' But Gaston Paris rightly points out that the Roman Church in its most ancient hymns must have imitated the old popular songs of Italy, of which Macaulay, as already indicated, was aware, and he finds at least a parallel source for French lyric, and one even more ancient, in the *carole*, a combination of song and dance performed by bands of girls, divided into leader and chorus, which was the most popular feature of country festivals in celebration of the coming of May. These festivals dated back very probably to pagan times and, so far from being religious, were often accompanied by so much hard drinking and loose love-making as to constitute them a scandal to the Church.

Few of the *caroles* dating from early in the twelfth century survive in their entirety, though their refrains are often incorporated in poetry of later date. Limousin and Poitou appear to be their first home, and Gaston Paris makes the quite

CHANTICLEER

reasonable suggestion that they form an original stock which spread rapidly throughout Provence and the south, and out of which came the *chansons populaires* that developed by various gradations into the *chanson courtois* of a sophisticated society. Here is a version of one of these *caroles*, sung by dancing girls at spring merry-makings in Poitou:

(5)

CAROLE

When the skies begin to clear, eya,
 For to show that joy is near, eya,
 And in jealous hearts strike fear, eya,
 Eager will our queen appear,
 Proud to show she is not coy.

Jealous one, away, away!
 Leave us, leave us to our play,
 Dancing to a roundelay.

She has sent a summons clear, eya,
 Far as ocean one can hear, eya,
 Lads and lassies there and here, eya,
 Never a one but must appear,
 Dancing in our dance of joy.

From afar the king draws near, eya,
 With the dance to interfere, eya,
 For he lives in mortal fear, eya,
 Some gallant may prove too dear,
 And our April queen decoy.

But, how hard he persevere, eya,
 No old man will she have near; eya,
 Some gay spark will win her ear, eya,
 Who knows well the way to cheer,
 One whose kisses never cloy.

Who has seen her dancing here, eya,
 Seen her lissom body veer, eya,
 He can cry with lips sincere, eya,
 In the world is not the peer

Of our queen, the queen of joy.
 Jealous one away, away!
 Leave us, leave us to our play,
 Dancing to a roundelay.

Professor Ker quotes from Giraldus Cambrensis, a Welshman writing in the twelfth century, an amusing story which not only illustrates the levity of the *carole*, but also shows how soon a French custom was acclimatized in England. Somewhere in the diocese of Worcester a wake was carried on all night in a churchyard, and the refrain constantly repeated by the dancers was so dinned into the priest's ears that he could not get it out of his head, but said at Mass instead of *Dominus vobiscum* 'Sweet Heart, have pity!' or 'Swete lemmen, thin are.' If in the twelfth century much of the English countryside was as gay as Worcestershire, one can understand the epigram of Richard de Cluny, quoted by Ascoli¹:

Anglia, plena jocis; gens libera, nata jocari,
 Tota jocosa, velim dicere tota jocus;
 Quae nihil a Gallis, sed Gallia mutuat inde
 Quidquid laetitiae, quidquid amoris habet.

Perhaps too we can understand how French minstrels to England in the twelfth century, after enjoying the freedom of a few of these wakes, might bring back stories that made proverbial the beauty of English women:

Qui veut belle dame acquerre
 Prenne visage d'Angleterre.

More elaborate are the *reverdies* and *aubes*, among which are to be found the loveliest of these early lyrics. The *reverdies*, hymns to spring, are instinct with the call of mating birds, the fresh green of the tender grass, the soft hues of blossoming trees; in short, the young life of all growing things; and the note of the *reverdie* runs through many an early lyric. The *aubes* represent the lyrical outcry of lovers forced to part at dawn, of which the supreme example is the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. And there are the laments: the lament of the ill-married wife, sometimes with a touch in it of the old *fabilian*, the lament of the girl

¹ *La Grande-Bretagne devant l'opinion française.*

who has lost her lover, of her who has not got one, and of the nun, immured in the cloister, who is denied one. Here are versions of a *reverdie* and of an *cube*, or *alba*, to give a Provençal poem its proper Provençal name, the latter perhaps the most famous of its kind:

(6)

REVERDIE

In the sweet spring-time, in May
 When with green the fields are gay,
 A nightingale upon a spray
 Heard I singing loud and clear.
 Ta-lirra ta-tweet!
 'Tis so sweet
 Sleeping by the greenwood here.

Falling in a reverie,
 Down I sat beside a tree:
 Slumber light came over me,
 So the bird's sweet song to hear.
 Ta-lirra ta-tweet!
 'Tis so sweet
 Sleeping by the greenwood here.

When I found myself awake
 Thanks I bade the song-bird take
 Who made merry for my sake:
 New delight my heart will cheer.
 Ta-lirra ta-tweet!
 'Tis so sweet
 Sleeping by the greenwood here.

And when to my feet I spring,
 Take my lute and pluck a string,
 How the bird began to sing
 By me in the meadow near!
 Ta-lirra ta-tweet!
 'Tis so sweet
 Sleeping by the greenwood here.

The nightingale I heard complain:
 Wellnigh mad with stress and strain
 How it gave him bitter pain
 That a clown his song should hear.
 Ta-lirra ta-tweet!
 'Tis so sweet
 Sleeping by the greenwood here.

(7)

ALBA

Within a garth neath hawthorn-boughs they hide:
 The lady clasps her lover to her side,
 Until the watchman's voice the dawn has cried.
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

'O would to God that night might last for aye,
 Nor far from me my lover ever stray,
 Nor ever watchman see or dawn or day!
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

Sweet lover, thou and I, come kiss and cling
 Down in the meadows where the sweet birds sing;
 Risk all, nor fear what jealousy may bring.
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

Sweet lover, once again love's fortunes try,
 Here in the close where birds make melody,
 Until the watchman winds his horn on high.
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

How sweet the radiant air that comes my way
 From my tall lover, courteous and gay;
 His breath thrills through me like a sweet sun-ray:
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

Lovely the lady is and rich in grace;
 So beautiful, men crowd to see her face,
 And her true heart in love finds still its place.
 Ah God, ah God, the dawn! How soon it comes!

With still more of conscious art in them are the *chansons d'histoire*, so called because they tell some sort of a story. A popular class of these were the *chansons de toile*, or songs sung by ladies over their needlework. One of the earliest and best-known of these is *Belle Érembor*, and of this we venture to offer a version, in assonance as with the original:

(8)

FAIR ÉREMBOR

When comes the month called May whose days are long,
And home the peers of France return from court,
Renaud returns, and marches in the front;
He passed before the house of Érembor
But did not deign to turn his head aloft.

 Ah, me! Renaud, my love!

Beside the window sits fair Érembor,
Upon her knees gay broidery she holds.
She sees the peers of France return from court,
She sees Renaud, who marches in the front.
Raising her voice, she cries her plaint aloud:
 ‘Ah, me! Renaud, my love!

‘My love, Renaud, well have I known the day,
Passing my father’s tower upon thy way
Thou wouldest have grieved, had I no word to say.’
‘Thine, daughter of an emperor, the blame!
Thou ’st loved another, let my memory fade.’
 Ah, me! Renaud, my love!

‘Lord Renaud, by the saints my name I ’ll clear;
A hundred virgins shall my oath receive,
And thirty matrons I will bring with me,
That I have loved no other man than thee.
Believe me, and a kiss shall be thy fee.
 Ah, me! Renaud, my love!’

Count Renaud climbed the steps from the courtyard.
Of shoulders broad, but slim at the waist-band,
His yellow hair curling in ringlets small,

Never, nowhere was bachelor so tall.
 Érembor sees him, and her tears lets fall.
 Ah, me! Renaud, my love!

Count Renaud now has entered in the tower;
 He seats him on a bed broidered with flowers,
 And there beside him sits fair Érembor.
 Then recommence their raptures as of yore.
 Ah, me! Renaud, my love!

Another and very remarkable example of the *chanson de toile* is *Bele Doette*, which seemed in the translator's mind naturally to take a form suggested by the old Scots ballad. He ventures to dedicate his version to Professor Boillot of Bristol, at whose instance it was undertaken.

(9)

FAIR DOUSIE

Fair Dousie by the window sat,
 A buik lay idle on her knee;
 She thocht her of her ain true luve,
 Was jousting gaen ayont the sea.
 O wae is me!

A horseman lit at the ha' door,
 And aff his saddle-bags he drew;
 Fair Dousie's loupen down the step;
 O' tidings ill nae fear she knew.
 O wae is me!

Fair Dousie askit him aff-hand:
 'Where is my lord, sac lang frae sicht?'
 Sair grieved, the page let fa' a tear.
 Fair Dousie stert, and swooned for fricht.
 O wae is me!

Fair Dousie rose and held her straight,
 And brawly faced him, standing there;
 Her heart was torn wi' teen and dole
 For the guid lord she'll see nae mair.
 O wae is me!

CHANTICLEER

Fair Dousie hastit for to ask:
 ‘Where is my lord I luve sac weel?’
 ‘Fore God I darena hide the news:
 My lord is deid: at joust he fell.’
 O wae is me!

Fair Dousie groaned, and syne she moaned:
 ‘Ill chance was thine, gentil lord Doon!
 For luve of thee a leathern shif,
 Nae robe of fur, shall hap me roun’.
 O wae is me!

I ’ll tae St. Pouls kirk, and tak the vaile for thee.

‘For thee will I an abbey build,
 Shall for the feast-day ready be;
 And nae fause luve may enter there,
 Nane such shall haud the richtfu’ key.
 O wae is me!

I ’ll tae St. Pouls kirk, and tak the vaile for thee.’

Fair Dousie hastit for to build;
 Stately the kirk, shall rise amain,
 And welcum a’ gudeman, gudewife,
 Who tholed for luve baith grief and pain.
 O wae is me!

I ’ll tae St. Pouls kirk, and tak the vaile for thee.

More sophisticated still are the *pastourelles*, many examples of which have survived. It cannot be denied that the reading of a series of these induces a feeling of tedium. The pattern of them is much the same. A knight or squire riding through the countryside encounters a charming shepherdess by the way; he dismounts and makes love to her, and is sometimes snubbed for his pains, though at other times the meeting leads to a *dénouement* more agreeable, as Mr. Abbott suggests, to the Wife of Bath. The pastoral setting of this artificial form is proof in itself of its affinity, in the last resort, to the folk-song. Very striking is the vogue of this pastoral note; in one form or another the pastoral persists in literature and art throughout the ages. It is to be found in the poetry of the Pleiad; Molière makes good fun of it

near the beginning of his *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*; Watteau adapted it to his art; and an embodiment of it late in the eighteenth century was the *fermerie* with its little rustic settlement attached to the Petit Trianon at Versailles for the amusement of Marie Antoinette. Here is an attempt to render one of the thirteenth-century *pastourelles* in a form closely corresponding to the original:

(10)

PASTOURELLE

From St. Quentin to Cambrai

As of late I ambled on,
In a wood beside my way
Such a lass I chanced upon!

There she shone
Fresh as is a rose in May;
Heart as gay,
For I heard her say,
Singing merrily:

'In God's name, I 've one at call
Handsome and tall,
Nutbrown though I be.'

To my shepherdess I went,
Whom I 'd seen in her retreat;
Courteously my head I bent,
Said: 'May God thee kindly greet,
'Tis but meet!

Maid I 've found here, rest content;
Love once lent
Claims ready assent.
With a smile said she:

'In God's name, I 've one at call
Handsome and tall,
Nutbrown though I be.'

Then I sat me by her side,
And I begged a kiss of her.
'Love like yours I 'll ne'er abide,'
So she said, 'for I prefer
Robin, sir,

CHANTICLEER

And I 'll be a shepherd's bride.
 He 's my pride;
 Of my lover tried
 Sing I cheerfully:
 In God's name, I 've one at call
 Handsome and tall,
 Nutbrown though I be.'

To end this brief review of early lyrical verse in France we have still to find room for that strange and beautiful combination of prose and verse, the tale of Aucassin and Nicolette. This *chantefable* or song-story, which may be the only survivor of several of its kind, has been claimed to be a mime, or dramatic monologue, animated by gesture and modulation of voice, breaking periodically into song; for the music to accompany the verse passages is given, as with the cuckoo song, in the original manuscript. It tells the story, in alternate passages of prose and lyrical seven-syllable verse, of two lovers, Aucassin, son of the Lord of Beaucaire, and Nicolette, a Saracen slave in the household of one of the count's vassals. Such a *mésalliance* as a marriage between them was not to be thought of, and they were forcibly separated. Nicolette was imprisoned in a tower, from which she escaped, and fled across fields and through the forest. Aucassin set off to find her, and succeeded in tracking her down. But after a series of romantic adventures the lovers are captured by a company of Saracen pirates, and carried off in different ships across the sea.

A storm scatters the ships, and Aucassin is wrecked near Beaucaire, his home, where his father now being dead he is hailed as rightful lord. Nicolette is carried off to Carthage, where it is discovered that she is the daughter of the King of Carthage, from whom she had been stolen as a child. At Carthage they sought to marry her to a Paynim king, but her heart is set on Aucassin; she disguises herself and escapes as a wandering gipsy minstrel, ceasing not in her wanderings over sea and land until she finds herself again in Beaucaire. There, with the help of her old mistress, she artfully discovers herself to her lover, overjoyed. Next day Aucassin, Lord of Beaucaire, is married to Nicolette, daughter of the King of Carthage, and they live together happily ever afterwards.

This wonderful little story did not become well known to the literary world until the nineteenth century. In England, in late Victorian days its fame was spread abroad by the successive translations of F. W. Bourdillon and Andrew Lang. It was not merely the exquisite passages in verse, charged with the love that Robert Browning in an inspired line speaks of—‘O lyric love, half angel and half bird!—that captivated the modern world, but also the daring of one of the prose passages that is worth quoting. When Aucassin is told that to marry Nicolette, a Saracen slave, is impossible, and that if he carries her off to be his mistress his soul will lie in hell, and he can never enter heaven, he replies: ‘What have I to do in Paradise? I seek not to enter there, so that I have Nicolette my most sweet friend. For to Paradise . . . go old priests, old cripples, and maimed wretches who grovel all day and night before altars, and in mouldy crypts, those clad in threadbare cloaks and in rags and tatters . . . who die of hunger and thirst and cold and miseries. These go to Paradise; with these I have naught to do. But to Hell will I go. For to Hell go goodly clerks and goodly knights, who have died in tourneys and great wars, and good soldier-men and free-born men: with them will I go. And there go those fair and gracious ladies who have lovers two or three, beside their rightful lords . . . with them will I go, so that I have with me Nicolette, my most sweet friend.’ This in the age of faith, in one of the great centuries of the building of churches and cathedrals, sculptured bibles in stone! Here was a new light on the Middle Ages.

However, read now the song of Nicolette in prison, rendered not, as in the original, in assonance, but in rhyme, in the attempt to give a modern reader more nearly the charm of it:

(ii)

NICOLETTE IN PRISON

Nicole must in prison lie
 In a vaulted chamber high,
 Built with art most curious,
 Dight with paintings marvellous.
 Gainst the marble window she,
 She so young leaned wearily.
 Blonde the hair upon her head,

CHANTICLEER

And well-arched her eyebrows' spread,
Oval was her face and bright;
Ne'er saw man a prettier sight.
Gazing on the close below
There she saw the roses blow,
Heard the birds make music wild,
And thus wailed that orphan child:
'Woe is me, poor captive me!
Wherefore should I prisoned be?
Young Lord Aucassin, give ear;
Long it is you 've loved me dear;
You can feel no hate for me,
Though for you I prisoned be
In this vaulted chamber high,
Where I live in misery.
But, by God, whom Mary bore,
Soon my durance will be o'er,
If I succeed.'

Next follows Aucassin's song when searching for Nicolette:

(12)

AUCASSIN'S SONG

Little star, whom now I see
By the moon that wooeth thee,
Nicolette is with thee there,
My mignon, the blonde of hair.
Doubtless God would have her light
To adorn the queen of night,
That she may be lovelier still.
If it pleased his sovran will,
Mignon who so far dost hide,
Now to raise me to thy side,
Though I fall to earth again,
How to kiss thee I would strain!
If a king's son I be born,
Well wouldst thou my rank adorn,
Sweet sister mine.

Finally, here is a version of the happy ending, when at the

last one of his court ladies, Nicolette's old mistress, takes him to the arms of his lost love:

(13)

THE HAPPY ENDING

So when Aucassin heard now
 That his love of radiant brow
 In the land was, as of yore,
 Joyful was he, never more!
 With the dame he went apace,
 Till he reached her resting-place;
 To the chamber soon they get
 Where sits waiting Nicolette.
 When she saw him at the door,
 Joyful was she, never more,
 Sprang, to face him, on her feet.
 And when he her eyes could meet,
 Both his arms he opened wide,
 Softly folded her inside,
 Kissed her both on cheek and eyc.
 So they let the night go by,
 Till at dawn in morning light
 Aucassin his troth could plight,
 Make her lady of Beaucairc.
 Life for many a day they sharc
 Mid delights that ne'er grow less.
 Aucassin has happiness,
 Nicolette the like has won:
 Song and story now are done,
 No more 's to tell!

As one dwells on the exquisite charm of early French lyric one is tempted to regret that the eyes and ears of the Romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century, caught by the beauties of the poetry of the Pleiad, had not yet revealed to them the light and music of a native lyric of far earlier date, to bewitch their brooding fancy.

CHAPTER II

LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD

THE most conspicuous link between the early and later medieval period, and between courtly and popular poetry, is to be found in that remarkable poem, completed in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, the *Romance of the Rose*,¹ the most influential of all early French poems on the course of European literature. The history of the poem is peculiar. It was begun about 1225 by Guillaume de Lorris, a young scholar who, inspired by Ovid, desired to give his countrymen in a long and intricate allegory a complete Art of Love. His work ended abruptly at his early death, when he had written between four and five thousand lines. Nearly fifty years later another poet, Jean Clopinet of Meung-sur-Loire, took up the unfinished work, and added another 18,000 lines to it, quite changing the character of the poem as a whole.

Whereas the first part was full of exquisite poetry, a charmingly graceful production, designed for courtly readers, many passages in it recalling to an English reader the fluent, dreamy charm of the best of William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, the second part of it is the work of one less graceful, but more vigorous, a man with a satirical turn, and one who had followed closely the political, social, and religious movements of the day; who poured his learning and philosophy into his work, with the result that the poem becomes a treasury of the life and thought of the period. The vogue of this great poem is attested by the existence of over two hundred manuscripts of it, and by the fact that Chaucer, well on in the fourteenth century, occupied himself by translating at least portions of it. Early French printers issued edition after edition of it, and in the sixteenth century it is one of the distinctions of Clément Marot that he took in hand the re-editing of it.

But the work of Jean de Meung, in which realism was so marked a feature, did not stand alone. Realism and individuality had

¹ A very great achievement is Mr. F. S. Ellis's verse translation of this poem, published by J. M. Dent & Sons.

appeared in the poetry of northern France even before the end of the twelfth century in Arras, the great centre of a teeming, prosperous, quarrelsome, social life in Picardy. The earliest of this new type of trouvère, very different from the Provençal singer of nightingales and blossoming trees, of warm summer nights and passionate love, was Jean Bodel, a most versatile poet, who wrote besides *pastourelles* and other poems a decadent *chanson de geste* or *roman d'aventures* on Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons, and struck out for himself a new line in the secularization of the mystery or miracle-play by introducing into his *Jeu de St. Nicolas* a vein of broad, human comedy, suitable for the cabaret or the tavern. Smitten by leprosy and forced to leave Arras, he wrote a pathetic poem of farewell.

After him came Adam de la Halle, who was also forced to leave Arras, driven out by internal dissensions, and he too wrote a touching but dignified farewell. He prospered in exile, and has the distinction of having written, perhaps fired by the success of Bodel's *Jeu de St. Nicolas*, the first two purely secular plays in France, in *Le Jeu de la Feuillée* a comedy, and in *Robin et Marion* what may almost be called an *opéra comique*.

A third well-known troubère was Colin Muset, of whose work but few examples survive, some of them light-hearted pieces with more than a touch of the *reverdie* and the *pastourelle* about them, and often a naïve personal note; but one of his poems is a precious document for the period, in that it gives a vivid picture of the varying fortunes of the professional minstrel's vagabond existence. Here is a version of this poem which attempts, while reproducing the form of the original so far as the translator's capacity could serve him, to give all its picturesque detail:

(14)

THE MINSTREL'S LIFE.

My lord, within thy halls I 've stayed,
And on my lute before thee played,
But naught for wages hast thou paid
To one who plied for thee his trade.

'Tis villeiny!

Now, by my faith in Saint Marie,

CHANTICLEER

No more thy follower I 'll be.
 An ill-found satchel here 's to see,
 And a purse lean through poverty.

My lord, come, let thy heart persuade
 Thy will to grant to me some aid,
 For, sire, a gift that 's freely made,
 A generous gift not long delayed,
 Marks high degree.

Trust me, I purpose verily
 To travel home to my country.
 If I return with purse empty,
 My wife will have no smile for me.

In words like these hear her upbraid :
 Sir Starveling, where can you have stayed,
 Who not a penny-piece have made?
 Too long about some town you 've strayed
 In revelry.

Limp saddlebags you bring to me,
 For stuffed with naught but wind they be.
 Oh, what a shameless wretch is he
 Who 'ld travel in your company !

But when I 'm home, and undismayed
 My wife has all my load surveyed,
 Fat saddlebags behind me laid
 And me in good grey cloth arrayed,
 Such finery,
 She flings her distaff down in glee ;
 She cannot hide her ecstasy,
 But laughs at me for jollity
 And round my neck clings lovingly.

For joy her work is not delayed,
 Straps are unloosed, my stuff displayed ;
 My man has watered well my jade,
 And rubbed her down, ere word was said ;
 Two capons from the yard my maid
 Has killed and cooked, and ready laid
 So savoury ;

My daughter out of courtesy
Has brought in hand a comb for me.
So I 'm at home His Majesty
In undisturbed felicity;
Say, can a man so happy be?

More important, however, than any of the Picard group was a man of humble origin, Rutebeuf, who, possibly born in Burgundy, lived out his penurious existence in Paris. He was a contemporary of Jean de Meung, and his poems give a picture of his time as valuable as the second part of the *Romance of the Rose*. The two poets must have known one another, or their work, and have reacted on one another. He was always poor, and he tells us much of the miseries of his life, particularly of his second marriage, in 1261, to a plain and elderly wife as poor as himself, of the worries of a fast-growing family, of the loss of his right eye, 'the one with which he saw the best,' of cold and hunger, and, with a veracity like Villon's, he makes no concealment of his haunting taverns and cabarets, and his passion for gambling, a passion he bitterly deplores. He wrote for money eulogies and elegies, and also sacred poems, including a play, his *Miracle de Théophile*, in the writing of which, despite the irregularities of his life, he was, like Villon, and Verlaine in certain moods, sincere.

But he was most himself in his satires, in his *fabliaux*, some of them coarse enough, and his monologues written for his own pleasure and that of his kind. A pamphleteer, he sang of most questions that agitated public opinion in his time, the time of St. Louis and Philip III. He shot at all who made a business of religion, pictists, hypocrites, religious orders, old and new, the mendicant orders, who, said he, under the protection of the king nourished themselves at the expense of the country. He took an active part, on the side of the secular clergy, in the violent quarrel that arose between the University of Paris and the Dominicans, and he rallied prelates, the nobility, and the rich on their lukewarmness in support of the Crusades. In this connection one of the best-known and most characteristic of his serious poems is a long dialogue between two knights, one of whom strives, and successfully, to convert the other to join a Crusade.

It has to be admitted that there is none of the glamour and music and sweeping rhythm of Villon's poetry about Rutebeuf's work. But he is forceful, epigrammatic at times, fond of a play upon words, and always tingling with verve. No love-song has he left. As illustrations of his work we offer, first, an example of the vigour of his attack on any, even religious, movement that struck him as among the abuses of his time. The *Béguines* against whom this skit was directed were women who lived in communities, without renouncing the world, for their vows were temporary only. The very picturesque *Béguinage* at Bruges will be familiar to visitors to that charming old city.

(15)

THE LAY-SISTERS

Whatever a lay-sister says
 Is good, and merits only praise;
 Whatever in her life you see
 Bears the impress of sanctity.
 She speaks as speaks a prophetess,
 Her smile reveals her friendliness;
 Her tears religious zeal attest,
 Asleep, she communes with the blest;
 Her dreams are visions from on high.
 Ignore it, should she tell a lie.

If a lay-sister turn to bride,
 'Tis but to show her social side;
 Her vows, her calling, do not bind
 Unto her death one of her kind.
 There's time for tears, and time for prayer,
 And time a wedding-ring to wear;
 Martha or Mary, as she warms
 To cloister, or a husband's arms.
 Of such an one never speak ill:
 Such is our good king's sovereign will.

Then comes a version of his appeal to St. Louis, where he gives a poignant picture of the poverty of a poet, and incidentally reveals one of the seamy sides of the Crusades, in robbing the

country of the rich and powerful, who might have spent their money and their energy so profitably on their tenants and clients, and their property at home. In his version the translator has failed to reproduce precisely the rhyme-scheme of the original:

(16)

THE POET'S POVERTY

Where to begin I do not know;
 Such are the stores of grief that grow
 As I recount my misery.
 True King of France, in God's name give
 The wherewithal a man may live;
 So wilt thou show great charity.
 I 've lived on gifts of other men,
 Loans that they thought I 'd pay again.
 At last no credit have I left,
 All know I 'm poor and deep in debt;
 And since abroad thy course is set,
 Of my sole hope I 'm now bereft.

Hard times and this my family—
 Of healthy appetite they be—
 Leave naught on which to raise a loan.
 Before me people shut the door,
 In art of giving scant their lore,
 Though all well-schooled to guard their own.
 Death has made havoc of my friends,
 And thou, good king, for pious ends,
 Hast swept my patrons far from me
 In two crusades to distant lands,
 Where Tunis, savage waste of sands,
 Rears an ill brood in heresy.

Great king, if I should fail with thee,
 I 've failed with all, no fault in me!
 Food fails me, and for food I fail.
 None grips my hand, I 've nought to pawn;
 From cold I cough, from hunger yawn,
 Both ills my tortured frame assail.

CHANTICLEER

I 've neither coverlet nor bed,
 Far as Senlis none so ill-fed ;
 Sire, I know not what way to go.
 How the hard straw my sides doth gall !
 A bed of straw 's no bed at all,
 And I 've for bed but straw to strow.

Sire, take to heart what I have said,
 I 've nothing left to buy me bread :
 Round me in Paris men have all,
 But naught is mine to cheer my soul.
Paulatim comes some meagre dole,
 Which makes me think more of St. Paul
 Than all the other saintly powers.
Our Father ! ay, but is he ours,
 When these hard times have ruined me,
 And have my lodging so bereft
 I 've neither creed nor credit left ?
 I 've nothing but what you can see.

Of the importance of Rutebeuf in those critical days of the later thirteenth century when the knell of feudalism had been sounded, and the power of the Roman Church begun to suffer some eclipse, a reader can satisfy himself by studying the references to him in Lavisé's *History of France*. And to show the contrast between the tone and temper of the early French lyric of the true southern type, whether written by troubadours or trouvères, and the specimens given of Colin Muset's and Rutebeuf's work, it will not be amiss, before passing on to the fourteenth century, to revert to that halycon period, and to quote two delightful verses from writers of *chansons courtois* but little earlier in date. Here is a verse from the farewell of the Châtelain de Coucy to his lady-love, whether the poetess known as the Lady of Faël, or some other, before starting on crusade :

Je m'en vois, dame ; a Dieu le creator
 Comant vo cors, en quel lieu que je soie ;
 Ne sai se ja verrez mais mon retor :
 Aventure est que ja mais vos revoie.

Por Dieu vos pri, quel part que li cors traie,
 Que voz convenz tenez, vieigne o demor,
 Et je pri Dieu qu'ensi me doinst onor
 Com je vos ai' esté amis verais.

Lady, I go ; to God our Sire's embrace
 I do commend thee, wheresoe'er I be ;
 I know not if once more thou 'lt see my face :
 'Tis but a chance if I return to thee.
 God grant that thou mayst still be true to me,
 If I return or no, whate'er my place,
 And I pray God to grant me of his grace
 So long as I too keep my fealty.

Here, too, a pretty fancy from a poem by Gace Brûlé, friend of Thibaut de Champagne :

Les oisillons de mon païs
 Ai oïz en Bretaigne ;
 A lor chant m'est il bien a vis
 Qu'en la douce Champaigne
 Les oï jadis,
 Se n'i ai mespris.
 Il m'ont en si dous penser mis
 Qu'a chançon fere me sui pris
 Tant que je parataigne
 Ce qu'Amours m'a lonc tens promis.

The song-birds of mine own countrie,
 I 've heard them in Bretayne ;
 And as they sang it seemed to me
 I heard at home again
 Their melody.
 O phantasy !
 They lulled me to a reverie
 So sweet, it set me singing free
 That so I might attain
 To what long since Love promised me.

But the day of the troubadours was over. Who was to succeed them?

It must be admitted that the later medieval period which covers the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not at first fulfil the promise of the earlier, whose last years indicated the possibilities of some great, new departure. It might well have been imagined that the vigour of satire, thought, and speech shown by Rutebeuf and Jean de Meung in the second part of the *Romance of the Rose*, and the graphic touches in their work that suggest the growth of a keen, questioning middle class, quick in the uptake, and enjoying life for all its stress and strain, for all its injustices, its hardships, and its petty annoyances and cares, would have been followed by a great development of realism in literary art.

Such was not the case. A mass of poetry was indeed produced in the two centuries under review, but, as will be learned as we proceed, most of it was poetry artificial in form, with no great depth of thought or profundity of feeling. And yet the period produced at its close one of the greatest of French poets, François Villon, perhaps the one poet in all modern literature who, measured by the bulk of his verse, ranks as a minor poet, though by the quality of it he ranks with the very greatest.

No doubt the explanation of the comparative barrenness of the period lies in the terrible conditions that prevailed throughout France, and particularly in northern France, during the Hundred Years' War, when towns and countryside were devastated not only by the invading armies of the English, but also by the roving forces set in motion by the internecine strife between the Burgundians and the adherents of the kings of France, struggling to maintain their insecure sovereignty at the heart of France, and to extend it over the nation as a whole.

The Hundred Years' War was mainly the result first of inevitable disputes arising in connection with the French possessions of the English kings, in respect of which they were reluctant vassals of the kings of France, and then of the claim of Edward III to the throne of France itself. The glories of the battles won against heavy odds, Crécy won by Edward III in 1346, Poitiers by Edward the Black Prince in 1356, and Agincourt by Henry V in 1415, have obscured the hopeless character of the English kings' efforts to conquer France. No series of expeditionary forces, even if composed of the finest fighting men in Europe, and led by the greatest captains of the day, could hope to conquer an

alien country larger than England itself, where no indigenous rising came to the support of the invaders. And when, through the heroic exertions of Joan of Arc, the maid-warrior of all time, the tide of victory turned in favour of France, and we were driven by a united nation out of the country, our own civil Wars of the Roses were preoccupation enough to cause us to abandon the struggle.

Dismal as were conditions in town and country during this devastating period, court life still went on, and a number of poets flourished, pouring out elegant poetry in the most artificial forms, ballades, rondels, rondeaux, chants royaux, virelais, and so forth. These are often graceful enough and of astonishing ingenuity; they are marked by an intricacy of pattern that resulted from playing on a mere handful of rhymes and the enforced repetition of the same refrain.

Readers of the lyrics of the early medieval period cannot fail to note that most of them, *chansons courtois* and the rest, have elaborate rhyme schemes, and many, from the *caroles* onwards, have a burden or refrain recurring at regular intervals. As the substance of a poem grew in content, and as the burden or refrain was also elaborated, while the two were knit together by an intricate nexus of rhyme, we find here the origin of the complicated artificial forms of the later medieval period. But the tendency, already noticeable in the more stilted of the *chansons courtois*, for song to pass into a metrical exercise becomes marked as we pass into the fourteenth century, and no one can be more severe on its poetry than Gustave Lanson, the most popular historian of French literature, who stigmatizes it as poetic form without poetry, or mere rhetoric, where all is technique and all technique the surmounting of difficulty.

Nevertheless it is well to remember that an intricate form of verse of early date, which the Pleid borrowed from Italy and established in France, viz. the sonnet, has survived through the ages, and no great poet has been trammelled by the elaboration of its form in the use of it for the expression of deep passion or high thought. This is worth recalling when we are faced with the marvellous ease with which Villon handled his ballades and rondeaux, and the tremendous force he put into them.

We may appropriately commence our illustrations of the poets

of this period by an example from one of the earliest of them, Guillaume de Machault (*c.* 1290–1377), whom Lanson calls the initiator of the rhetoric he denounces, with his *rimes serpentines*, *équivoques*, *léonines*, *croisées* or *rétrogrades*, *sonnantes* or *consonantes*. He was one who moved in high circles, and indeed was at one time secretary to the blind King John of Bohemia, who was killed at the battle of Crécy. Of his great output of 80,000 lines we offer but one little poem, a rondeau, which, one feels, might fitly be inscribed on vellum in the style of the illuminators of his time:

(17)

Fair as a lily, redder than the rose,
 And like an orient ruby shining bright,
 While in mine eyes your matchless beauty glows,
 Fair as a lily, redder than the rose,
 My rapt desires no other goal disclose
 Save, for your sake, to live as in Love's sight,
 Fair as a lily, redder than the rose,
 And like an orient ruby shining bright.

Next we offer versions of two rondeaux by Jean Froissart (1337–1410), who well holds his own with his brother poets, though far more famous as a prose-writer than as a poet. His glorious Chronicles unfold the story of the wars between England and France like one of the brilliant tapestries of early date, and still captivate their reader with the vigour and picturesqueness of their style. The first of these rondeaux is akin in sentiment to that of Machault, but the second strikes a simpler and more domestic note:

(18)

Scent of the rose fills all my heart with glee,
 Sight of my mistress is my heart's delight;
 Which of the two should win the mastery?
 Scent of the rose fills all my heart with glee.
 Now, by my soul, this must the answer be:
 Harmless the scent, I dare not trust my sight.
 Scent of the rose fills all my heart with glee,
 Sight of my mistress is my heart's delight.

(19)

Come back, my friend, too long dost thou delay;
 Trouble and grief thine absence makes for me.
 My spirit calls for thee the livelong day.
 Come back, my friend, too long dost thou delay;
 For there is none, save thee, can make me gay,
 Nor shall, till home again I welcome thee.
 Come back, my friend, too long dost thou delay;
 Trouble and grief thine absence makes for me.

But now we come to Eustache Deschamps (*c.* 1340–1410), a native of Champagne, of humble birth though he rose to important office under King Charles V, surnamed ‘the Wise,’ and Charles VI. He must be accounted the most important poet of his time, and deserves more indulgent treatment than he receives from Lanson. His output, certainly, was prodigious, for we have over 1,500 ballades by him, not to speak of lais, rondeaux, virelais, etc. There is realism and moral fervour in his work, he had complaints of his own to air, and he wrote much on the vices and miseries of his time, and in hatred of the English, to whose invasions so much of the suffering of his country was due.

Among his ballades are two of special interest, one on the death of Bertrand du Guesclin, the first French fighting-man, who as a leader of the Italian *condottiere* type, but a patriot, proved a match for any English general, the refrain of the ballade running

Lament, lament the flower of chivalry,

and the other a tribute to our own Geoffrey Chaucer, whose achievement in the translation of French he celebrates in the refrain:

Grant translateur, noble Geffroy Chaucier.

One of Deschamps’s virelais, unfortunately quite untranslatable into English of anything like its delightful pattern, is as gay, as enticing a poem as will be found in all French literature. The first and twelfth of thirteen stanzas, with the *introit*, run as follows:

Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?
 Il me semble, a mon avis,
 Que j’ay beau front et doulz viz

CHANTICLEER

Et la bouche vermeillette;
Dites moi se je suis belle.

C'est un mondains paradiz
Que d'avoir dame toudis,
Ainsi fresche, ainsi nouvelle;
Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

To represent Deschamps in English versions here we must confine ourselves to a rondeau by him, and a rondel, the latter of which shows that the fear of death was never far from the poets of those days:

(20)

RONDEAU

In summer is the time to go to war,
Or in the spring, when grass grows thick and green,
When days are warm, and winter quits the scene:

Horses have what they love in ample store,
And snug the quarters that so cold have been.

In summer is the time to go to war,
Or in the spring, when grass grows thick and green:

Deep buried, snow and hail are here no more,
Down every street one hears men sing serene;
Fight then; in winter lie the sheets between.

In summer is the time to go to war,
Or in the spring, when grass grows thick and green,
When days are warm, and winter quits the scene.

(21)

RONDEL

Hasten to my jubilee:
I have passed my fiftieth year:

Gone my days of jollity:
Hasten to my jubilee.

Farc ye well! Remember me!
 All my body quakes with fear.
 Hasten to my jubilee:
 I have passed my fiftieth year.

After the middle of the fourteenth century there came, in 1364, to the throne the remarkable king, Charles V, surnamed 'the Wise.' He was a delicate, sickly creature, and of poor appearance; but he had just the qualities required to cope with the English king, Edward III, viz. shrewdness and tenacity. He did much to improve the finance of the country by reforming its coinage, and after his experience, as dauphin, on the field of Poitiers, from which he escaped by flight, he realized that the right policy was to avoid pitched battles and wear down the English by delay. And if no soldier himself, he found in Du Guesclin, the son of a Breton gentleman, the well-forged instrument to reform French warfare, as he had himself reformed the French coinage. A picture of Charles's simple, ordered life, as well as of his unscrupulousness, is given in one of the writings of Christine de Pisan, the most remarkable woman of her time, of whom we have now to speak.

Christine de Pisan (c. 1363-1430), one of the select company of eminent women poets, was a pupil of Deschamps. She was the daughter of one Thomas de Pisan, an Italian, who became astrologer at the court of Charles V. Losing early both father and husband, she had to devote herself to letters as a means of livelihood for herself and her three children. She wrote much in prose as well as verse, and, as indicated above, her works are among the contemporary sources for the history of the reign of Charles V and for a knowledge of the social life and the manners and domestic life of her time.

As a champion of her sex she was among the earliest, and she wrote a spirited defence of women against the satirical attacks of Jean de Meung in the *Romance of the Rose*. It is interesting to note that a woman of her quality was much sought after, and she was tempted by offers to make her home at the courts both of England and Milan, but she remained faithful to her adopted country, France. How graceful her poetry could be may perhaps be gauged from the following versions of three of her rondeaux, all of which have a suggestion of that feminine touch of which

more will be said when we come to deal with Louise Labé and Madame Desbordes-Valmore:

(22)

Gay, flashing eyes, who have my heart confined
 Within your glances' love-encircling net,
 To you I yield me with no fond regret,
 Rejoicing to be caught by lure so kind.

So rich the virtues in your light enshrined,
 None can compute the price thereon to set,
 Gay, flashing eyes, who have my heart confined.

Sweetness, charm, courtesy are so combined,
 There's not the man, whatever cares may fret,
 Who will not, if but one sweet glance he get,
 Feel comfort steal into his troubled mind,
 Gay, flashing eyes, who have my heart confined.

(23)

If frequently to mass I go,
 My beauty there I fain would see;
 Fresh as a new-blown rose is she.

Men waste their time who gossip so;
 Why should they talk maliciously,
 If frequently to mass I go?

Nor road nor path my footsteps know,
 Save one that leads where she may be.
 How foolish he who fool calls me,
 If frequently to mass I go.

(24)

How hard a thing it is to bear,
 When the heart weeps and the mouth sings.

When even lament one has to spare,
 How hard a thing it is to bear.

Such is her lot if one should dare
 To face what slanders envy flings;
 How hard a thing it is to bear!

Next in order of date among the leading poets of the period comes Alain Chartier (*c.* 1386–1444), a scholar of the University of Paris, who rose to court office. He was attached as secretary to Charles VII, whose throne was saved for him by Joan of Arc, and who was crowned King of France at Rheims in 1429, with the heroine standing by his side. During Charles's troubled reign, though English invasion, thanks to Joan of Arc, became less and less effective, there was still much misery abroad, and of this, as of the vices of the nobility and clergy, Alain Chartier has much to say in his prose works.

It is of him that the charming story is told, how Margaret of Scotland, Queen of France, finding him asleep one day, kissed the precious lips ‘from which had fallen so many good sayings and virtuous words.’ The story is probably quite mythical, for dates do not favour it, but what a tribute is the story to the high estimation in which a famous poet was held! The example to be given here of his poetry differs from those so far given of others of his period, which are of lighter import. Of Alain Chartier we offer a version of his fine ballade on the folly of mankind, written in high moral vein, a piece more worthily representing the serious poetry of the period than anything we have offered from the great output of his predecessors:

(25)

O FOOL OF FOOLS!

O fool of fools, fool that is mortal man,
 Who trusts so much in gifts by Fortune strown,
 Upon this earth, the prospect where you scan,
 What can you find to call your very own?
 Nothing is yours, save what by way of loan
 Nature with gracious hand to grant may deign.
 If Fortune's smile should chance at last to wane,
 And you are left of what you had forlorn,
 She robs you not, but both are quits again,
 For you had naught the day when you were born.

CHANTICLEER.

Neglect not sleeping all the hours you can
 Upon your bed when dark the night is grown,
 To pile up wealth in heaps you scarce can span;
 Nor covet anything beneath the moon,
 From Paris even as far as Pampelune,
 Save what poor human creatures must obtain,
 Such food and drink as will your frame sustain;
 Suffice it that brave deeds your life adorn,
 And that your sepulchre some honour gain:
 For you had naught the day when you were born.

The trees' delicious fruits when time began
 And everything as common good was known,
 Sweet honey, swelling grain, by nature's plan
 For food to man and wife sufficed alone.
 No ground for quarrel then, no cause to moan.
 Sore tried by heat or cold never complain,
 But take as fair what Fortune may ordain.
 Under your losses grumble not, nor mourn
 Beyond due measure where the limit's plain,
 For you had naught the day when you were born.

If Fortune deals a blow to give you pain,
 Hers is the right, and yours no cause for scorn,
 E'en though she strip you bare against the rain;
 For you had naught the day when you were born.

And now we break loose for a moment from the artificial literary atmosphere of a period when the art and science of rhetoric flourished so luxuriantly, to drink in a breath of the popular poetry which did exist at the same time. In 1875 Gaston Paris published for the Society of Ancient French Texts, as its first volume, a fine old manuscript in the National Library, probably written at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The manuscript contained also the old music to accompany the songs, and this too was transcribed by a skilled hand. These poems are not of the high lyric quality of the songs of the troubadours and the trouvères, but they are marked by a delightful simplicity; some have more grace than others, and they vary in the delicacy of pure poetic quality. They reflect the manners and

CHANTICLEER

(27)

LAMENT

Brave gentlemen of France,
 Whom bound for war I see,
 I beg you, of your grace,
 To greet my love for me.

'How can I greet your love,
 Whom I know not by sight?'
 'Easy is he to know,
 Clad all in armour white;

'A white-cross knight is he,
 Golden the spurs he wears,
 And silver-gilt the tip
 That on his lance he bears.'

'Cease weeping, lady fair,
 For he is dead, I know:
 In Brittany he fell,
 The Bretons laid him low.

'I saw men dig his grave
 On a green meadow's rim,
 And heard four friars sing
 The last, sad mass for him.'

As a pendant to the lament for the fate of Olivier Basselin it may not be amiss to quote a verse from a French poem,¹ expressing pity for the misery of some English prisoner during the Hundred Years' War, who can only vent his grief in his own language:

De son grand mal pitié avais,
 Et aussi mon cœur se doutait
 Que un jour avoir eu pourrais
 Autant, qui me déconfortait.
 Et quand a lui on demandait:
 'Hélas, qu'avez-vous, mon ami?'
 Autre chose ne répondait:
 'God and Our Lady, help my!'

¹ Quoted by Ascoli. See note, p. 23.

Lastly we offer a little love-song, not because of its poetic merit, which is small, but because of the extreme simplicity and modernity of it:

(28)

THE POST

And I 've had letters, sooth to say,
Sent by my love to me;
Ah, how I 'll guard them night and day!
I live in ecstasy.

For on my troth I love him so,
I 've nought can ease provide
Or make my heart contentment know,
Like living by his side.

Other delights are as the wind,
Whatever meets the eye;
To have near by one's lover kind,
Can there be joy so high?

Reverting now to the literary poetry of the fifteenth century, we end our account of this later medieval period by introducing the distinguished name of Charles d'Orléans (1391-1465), and the far greater name of Villon. Charles d'Orléans, grandson of Charles the Wise, and father of Louis XII, is remarkable as one of the greatest of the select company of royal poets. He had Italian blood in him, for his mother was daughter of Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan.

As a youth he married for his first wife his cousin, the young widow of our Richard II. At the age of twenty-five he was captured by Henry V at Agincourt, and carried off to England. A prisoner whose person was so near to the throne of France was not lightly to be parted with, and his captivity, far from a rigorous one, lasted for twenty-five years, and it may be that the enforced leisure he enjoyed gave the incentive as well as the opportunity to indulge his poetical bent. He learnt English, and indeed wrote poems in our language. But his best work probably dates from his fiftieth year, when he was finally ransomed and returned to France. There he took little part in

politics, but during the long autumn of his life kept court at Blois, where he gathered round him poets of the day, and held as it were literary tournaments, in which his guests could prove their skill. Among those he thus entertained—and this is one of his titles to fame—was Villon himself, whose high repute as a poet and, no doubt, brilliance in talk and jest quite outweighed in the eyes of his gifted host his unattractive exterior and unsavoury character.

As a poet Charles d'Orléans shows little depth of thought or strength of passion, but in delicate grace and a languid charm he surpassed all his contemporaries, and in these qualities has not been excelled by any poet of his race. And there is a note of spring in his verse and of wistfulness, and a mild melancholy, all of which are among the characteristics of Ronsard and his school in the halcyon days of the French Renaissance. As examples of his work we venture to give versions of two of his exquisite rondeaux, which will find a place in French anthologies for all time:

TWO RONDEAUX

(29)

The year his winter cloak lets fall;
 Wind, snow, and rain, he lays them by,
 And dons the shining broidery
 Of lucid sunlight, gilding all.
 The birds and beasts, both great and small,
 Do in their jargon sing or cry:
 The year his winter cloak lets fall;
 Wind, snow, and rain, he lays them by.
 River and brook and waterfall
 Wear, for a sparkling livery,
 Their gold and silver jewelry;
 All deck them for high festival.
 The year his winter cloak lets fall.

(30)

O God, how good she is to see,
 My gracious lady, kind and fair!
 For the great virtues to her share
 All mortals in her praise agree.

Who could find stale her company?
 Fresh beauties still are budding there.
 O God, how good she is to see,
 My gracious lady, kind and fair!
 Or here, or therc, across the sea,
 Matron or maid I find nowhere
 With her perfection can compare;
 Dream-like she comes in thought to me.
 O God, how good she is to see!

The reader may find it interesting to compare with these modern renderings one written in English contemporary, or almost contemporary, with the original French. In 1827 Dr. Watson Taylor published for the Roxburghe Club, from a manuscript in the British Museum, an English translation of a mass of Charles d'Orléans's poetry, and of a number of poems by other authors; he claimed these English renderings for the duke himself. This is hardly believable, and such English, French, and German critical opinion as has occupied itself with the matter is dead against the claim. The question remains, what English (or French) poet of the time was accomplished enough to write them, many of them so admirably done. Here is the early rendering, not too adequate, of the second of the two rondeaux given above:

(30A)

O God how that she lokith verry fayre
 The goodly swete my very hertis blis
 That for the grace the which that in hir is
 To everi wight hir prays doth newe repayre
 Who is it he that kouthe hit loo contrayre
 For hir bewte renewith ay y wis

O God how that she lokith verry fayre
 The goodly swete my very hertis bliss
 She hath no peere she lyvith wt-outen eyre
 Of alle the fayre y except noon as this
 For in hir loo ther nys oon poynt amys
 Tis a dere hert worth a thousand payre

O God how that she lokith verry fayre
 The goodly swete my very hertis bliss.

Finally let us set against this early English translation a short English poem that is probably an authentic piece by Charles himself:

My hertly love is in your governauns,
 And ever shall whil that I live may.
 I pray to God that I may see that day
 That we be knyt with trouthfull alyauns.
 Ye shall not fynd feyning or variauns
 As in my part; that will I trewly say:
 My hertly love is in your governauns.

Grim beside the figure of Charles d'Orléans is that of Villon,¹ which now confronts us. He was born in Paris in 1431; whether his real name was Montcorbier or Des Loges is still a matter of dispute, but, his mother living in great poverty, he was taken charge of by a kindly benefactor, Guillaume de Villon, chaplain of the collegiate church of St. Benoît, who received him into his house, and saw him through his university course. From this good friend he took the name by which he is universally known. The facts of his life are derived from an intensive study by French scholars of his works, in themselves largely autobiographical, and also of the criminal records of his time.

In his early boyhood English soldiers with their Burgundian allies still haunted the taverns of the city, and roamed through its alleys; and though the Hundred Years' War was soon at an end, and the kingdom of France established, the narrow ill-lighted streets of the capital must long have swarmed with a wild population always bred in a long period of misery. It is not, therefore, surprising that the young Villon, an attractive figure for his recklessness, his brilliance, and his wit, though not indeed for his good looks, soon fell among evil companions. Two of these, Roger de Montigny, of good family, and Colin de Cayeux, son of a locksmith, and so a useful member in any company of thieves, ultimately came to bad ends, the former being hanged, and the latter broken on the wheel. A contemporary was that amazing figure of her time, the notorious Huguette du Hamel, Abbess of Port-Royal, a very different representative of the Church from the benign Guillaume de Villon, but whose licen-

¹ For a full and vivid account of Villon's life and works see D. B. Wyndham Lewis's *François Villon*, Peter Davies, London.

tious life shows what was possible in unbridled vice in Paris of the fifteenth century.

The first of Villon's serious escapades occurred when he was nearly twenty-five years of age. On the evening of the 5th June 1455, the day of the popular festival of the Fête-Dieu, Villon was seated on a bench near St. Benoit's with a girl named Isabeau and Gilles, a priest, when up came another priest named Sermoise and Jean le Hardi, a master of arts of the university. An altercation followed, ending in a scuffle. Gilles and Isabeau made themselves scarce, and Villon had to defend himself against the two aggressors. Sermoise drew first blood, but received a dagger thrust in return, and a blow from a stone in the face. He died of his wounds, and Villon fled from Paris. In his absence he was sentenced to banishment. But in six months' time the sentence was remitted, and Villon returned to his old haunts.

His pardon on this occasion, and the leniency shown again and again in his short life, seem to indicate that if his brilliant qualities gained him the fatal friendship of the ruffians and outcast women who were his boon companions, they won for him also the interest of men of good standing and of influence. Anyhow, within a year he was in trouble again, and hastily left Paris for Angers. In his *Lesser Testament* he accounts for his flight by the resentment he felt after the humiliation of a thrashing he received under the very eyes of one, Catherine de Vaucelles, to whom he was paying his addresses, and who treated him like a heartless coquette: he sought to shake off the shackles of his love. But he had other good reasons for disappearing. He had recently been engaged with the gang of thieves he had formed, or joined, in more than one great robbery in Paris, including one at his old seminary, the Collège de Navarre; and Angers, where an uncle of his was living as a monk, was worth surveying as a field for further operations. Ultimately, through the indiscreet revelations made in his cups by one of his confederates, Guy Taberie by name, the authors of the burglary at the Collège de Navarre were discovered.

Thus two years after he had left Paris Villon was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. Again it is probable that influential friends intervened in his behalf, for the death penalty in his case, though not in Guy Taberie's, was commuted to perpetual banishment from Paris. Probably it was in the interval between

the death sentence and the commuting of it that he wrote his tremendous ballade in expectation of being hanged.

There was nothing for him now but a wandering life, and it was in the course of this that he must have found his way to the court of Charles d'Orléans at Blois, where he took part in one of the duke's poetic tournaments. It is indeed conceivable that Charles, steeped in poetry himself, and realizing in Villon the poet behind the rogue, was one who, when appealed to for help in dire distress, did not turn a deaf ear. But once more Villon's evil fate dogged him, for in 1461 he was again arrested, apparently for sacrilege, and imprisoned by the Bishop of Orleans in a sort of dungeon in the Castle of Meung, the birthplace of the poet who completed the *Romance of the Rose*. Of the miseries and the tortures he endured during his incarceration there we have a full account in his *Greater Testament*. He obtained pardon and release late in the year on the accession of Louis XI, whether as the result of a general gaol-delivery or out of special favour is unknown.

The important fact is that on his immediate return to Paris he took in hand the composition of his monumental poem, the *Greater Testament*, the work that has immortalized him. He was only thirty years of age, but there can be no reasonable doubt that his short life of crime, debauchery, and privation, with the constant prickings of a tortured conscience and the terrors of a hunted animal, had made a wreck of him, and he was conscious that the hand of death was on him. However, there was to be no peace for him. A year later he was once more in serious trouble. He had been present at an affray, again near St. Benoît's, in which a well-known notary and his clerks had been grossly assaulted, and the notary himself wounded with a dagger. It would appear that Villon himself took no part in the scuffle. Nevertheless he was sentenced to death a second time. He appealed, and the order issued by the Parliament of Paris, dated 5th January 1463, which commuted the sentence of death to one of banishment gives us the last authentic news we have of him. Out into banishment he went and, this time, out into the void.

Such, in brief outline, is what is known of Villon's life and character. The poetry which has given him his high rank among the great poets, not merely of a nation, but of the world, is small

in quantity. It consists in the main of two poems, the *Lesser Testament* of forty stanzas, and the *Greater Testament*, a longer poem with some twenty ballades and rondeaux of matchless quality interspersed. The kind of poem known as a Testament was a recognized type in medieval France. The author in the guise of testator disposes of his real and imaginary belongings among his boon companions and friends, his enemies and oppressors alike, and the scope afforded for the expression of wit, humour, irony, satire, and even invective on the one hand, and gratitude, admiration, and affection on the other, as well as, in the case of one of Villon's temperament and course of life, of bitter regret and remorse, will readily be recognized.

The *Lesser Testament* was written after his second flight from Paris, which he accounted for as a move to escape from the heartless Catherine de Vaucelles, though as suggested above there were probably other reasons as well; but the *Greater Testament* was, we repeat, written with the shadow of death hanging over him, after he had got release from the Bishop of Orleans's prison at Meung, and returned to Paris a broken man. An intensely personal note is struck throughout the poem; it is nothing less than an *apologia pro vita sua*, and never has one more poignant been written by man. It is haunted by remorse for an ill-spent youth, the horror of old age, and the fear of death, the certain end that awaits all mankind, prince and pauper, beauty born in high degree, and the wanton of the streets, saint and outcast. But for all this fear of death, he is frank throughout, does not disguise how low in debauchery he sank, nay, avows his enjoyment at the time of the sensual man's good things in life, rich food, good wine, and love, chuckles over success in crime, makes no pretence of suffering for others' guilt. It is this utter absence of hypocrisy, the frank avowal of his shame as of his repentance, and his blank dismay in the face of death that have atoned in just men's eyes for much that would otherwise arouse but disgust and reprobation, and given him a moral standing of his own.

He is not to be envied who can rise from a study of Villon without that pity for the man which is akin to love, as well as an exultant admiration of his genius. As a poet he handled the complicated verse-forms of his day with an ease and mastery that make their content as plain and straightforward as anything

written in less sophisticated form. Indeed it may be argued that the very restraint imposed by form on one of his tumultuous power has given his poems the greatness that they have. They display wit, humour, grace, tenderness, and pathos, strength, biting satire, and fierce invective, and in none of these qualities has he been surpassed. With a single word, a short incisive phrase, a touch of sheer realism, a haunting refrain, he can raise one to romantic heights, or hurl one into the depths. A fine tribute to him will be found in the eloquent introduction to John Payne's great translation¹ of his poems, which made Villon known in this country as never before. Let us quote a fragment from it: 'He rejects nothing as common or unclean . . . his wit and pathos are like the sun which shines with equal and impartial light upon the evil and the good.'

The compelling charm of Villon's poetry has drawn many translators to the attempt to give some indication of its quality to English readers. Most of them have realized that in Villon's case no mere paraphrase will do; a real effort must be made to give as far as possible the form as well as the substance of the original. That has been the present writer's purpose, and if to some degree he has achieved it, without sacrificing all the magic of the master's verse; if, in other words, his versions do recall to those who know the originals the faintest suggestion of their peculiar charm, the labour he has expended will not have been in vain. Let us begin by giving a version of the stanza in the *Greater Testament* in which he speaks of his humble origin:

(31)

GRANT TESTAMENT, XXXV

Poor was I ever since a lad,
Of poor and humble stock I came;
No wealth at all my father had,
Nor his forbear, Horace by name;
Poverty dogs us, aye the same.
And where my ancestors are laid
(Whose souls God in his bounty claim!),
No crown or sceptre is displayed.

¹ A later, and very accomplished, translation is Mr. J. H. Lepper's *The Testaments of François Villon*, 1924, Casanova Society.

Then may follow the poignant expression of his regret for a wasted youth:

(32)

GRANT TESTAMENT, XXVI—XXIX

Ah, God ! if in my foolish youth
 My books at school I 'd duly read,
 And followed honesty and truth,
 A home were mine, and feather-bed.
 But no ! away from school I fled,
 As naughty little boys will do.
 As I set down what I have said,
 My heart is like to break in two.

The Preacher's word too lightly won
 My will, and brought but wretchedness,
 Who said : 'Enjoy thyself, my son,
 Whiles thou art young.' Nevertheless
 Another truth he doth impress
 Elsewhere, and so he says again—
 These are his words, nor more or less—
 'Youth and the prime of life are vain.'

My days, says Job, away are fled,
 Like threads before the burning tow,
 Which o'er the cloth before him spread
 The weaver passes to and fro ;
 If one loose thread its end should show
 He burns it in a flash away.
 So now I fear nor threat nor blow ;
 Death will at last all pain allay.

Where are the lads so gay and tall
 Whom I forgathered with of old,
 In speech and song so ready all,
 In word and deed so frank and bold?
 Some of them now are stiff and cold,
 No vestige of them will you find :
 May Paradise their souls enfold,
 And God save him who lags behind !

A page or two after this cry of regret we are confronted with the first and most beautiful of all his ballades, one of the loveliest poems in the world, the *Ballade of Ladies of Old Time*. The version which follows the translator offers with many apologies. Mr. Paul Hookham's rendering of it in his *Ballades of François Villon interpreted into English Verse*, a little volume published by Messrs. Blackwell, and as delightful to handle and to look at as to read, had long seemed to him the one which had more of the tang of the original than any other. It had so sunk into his consciousness that he found himself quite unable to produce an original version of his own. For more than one reason he was unable to borrow it and print it as it stood. But the ballade would not let him be, and in desperation he set himself to work on Mr. Hookham's version. If he has done what he ought not to have done he craves indulgence, and hopes he may be forgiven, provided that he has not ruined both the original and the poetic quality of Mr. Hookham's rendering, in his passionate desire to give in his book some version of these haunting lines:

(33)

LADIES OF OLD TIME

Tell me where, in what country is
 Flora, the beautiful Romane;
 Archipiada, and Thais,
 Who cousin was to her germane;
 Echo, whose accents still retain
 The call that sounds o'er stream and mere,
 Who beauty had more than humane?
 Say where the snows of a past year!

Where is the all-wise Heloise,
 For whom, unmanned, did monk remain
 Pierre Esbaillart at Saint-Denys?
 His love it was cost him that pain.
 And where the queen who did ordain
 That Buridan, once loved too dear,
 Sewn in a sack should drown in Seine?
 Say where the snows of a past year!

Queen Blanche, as fair as fleur-de-lys,
 Who sang with siren-voice her strain;
 And big-foot Berte, Bictris, Allys;
 Haremboerges, mistress over Maine;
 And Jeanne, that good soul from Lorraine,
 By English burnt at Rouen here;
 Where are they, Virgin Soveraine?
 Say where the snows of a past year!

Prince, where they are, ask not again
 This week, this year, in hope to hear;
 Live haunted still by this refrain:
 Say where the snows of a past year!

Who were these dead ladies whose names Villon has immortalized? Flora was the name borne by many a well-known Roman courtesan; Archipiada, or Archipiades, stands for one of her Greek compeers, though the name is a corruption of that of Alcibiades, legends of whose beauty and licentious life led by some strange chance to his being mistaken in the Middle Ages for a woman. Echo is the nymph changed by Narcissus into a rock. Of Heloise and Abelard the story is well known. An expanded version of the legend of Buridan and Margaret of Burgundy, unfaithful wife of the quarrelsome Louis X, will be found in Dumas's thrilling cloak-and-dagger drama, *La Tour de Nesle*, of which a good translation by A. L. Gowans has been published by Gowans and Gray. Queen Blanche was Blanche of Castile, mother of St. Louis. Thusnæs has pointed out that Berte, Bietris, and Allys are the three great ladies who figure in the Lotharingian epic, *Hervi de Metz*. Aelis, daughter of Pierre, Duke of Lorraine, married a courtier of her father's. Their son, Hervi, married Bietris, whose brother was Flores, father of Berte, the mother of Charlemagne. Thus Berte was the niece of Bietris, daughter-in-law of Aelis. Haremboerges, or Haremburgis, heiress of Maine, is probably the lady who married Fulke V of Anjou; Madame Duclaux has made the enticing conjecture that she may stand for the fair Érembor of the old *chanson de toile*. Joan of Arc we know.

The address of this ballade to a certain *prince* recalls a feature of the poetical life of medieval times, viz. the verse-contests,

such as the famous *Jeux floraux* of Toulouse. These were presided over by a president, styled prince, and naturally the *envoi* to many ballades was addressed to him. Often enough in Provence, and later, as at Charles d'Orléans's court at Blois, the president may have been a prince in very fact.

Next we give the stanzas from the *Greater Testament* leading up to the fine ballade he composed for his mother's sake, followed by a version of the ballade itself.

(34)

GRANT TESTAMENT, LXXV—LXXIX

First, give I this poor soul of mine
Unto the blessed Trinity,
And to Our Lady's grace resign,
Who harbour'd our Divinity ;
Beseeching all the charity
Of the nine Angel Orders fair,
That they may bear the gift on high
Before the throne so rich and rare.

Item, I give my body here
To mother earth, who all men bore ;
Small fat thereon the worms will cheer,
Hunger has ravaged it so sore.
Quickly my flesh to her restore ;
From earth it came, seeks earth again.
All things, unless I err the more,
Gladly their proper place regain.

To Master Guillaume de Villon,
Who more than father was to me,
Kinder than mother to her son,
The child from swaddling bands set free :
He saved me after many a spree,
And therefrom got scant happiness ;
Wherefore I pray on bended knee
Some joy at last his soul may bless.

Item, I give my library,
And *Legend of the Stolen Mascot*,
The which Master Guy Tabarie

Wrote out, the man who lieth not;
Under a table lies the lot
In quires, and though but rudely writ,
Its theme so great a fame has got
As makes up for the form of it.

Item, on my poor mother I
Bestow this prayer to Our Mistress ;
She wept for me full bitterly,
And had, God knows, cause for distress :
No other stronghold or fortress
Than Her above can I provide
For soul and body in sore stress,
Nor elsewhere my poor mother hide.

Of the nine orders of Angels referred to in the first stanza Milton's famous line names five :

Thrones, Dominations, Prinedoms, Virtues, Powers.

The remaining four are the two highest orders, Seraphim and Cherubim, and, to complete the list, Archangels and Angels. There is a useful note of Butler's on these angelic hierarchies; see l. 98, Canto xxviii, of his edition of Dante's *Paradiso*. The third stanza contains Villon's tribute to his great benefactor, Guillaume de Villon, whose name he took. In the fourth stanza we have ventured to translate *Le Rommant du Pet au Deable* by *The Legend of the Stolen Mascot*. The *Pet au Deable* was a boundary stone in front of the Hôtel du Pet au Deable, the residence of one of the great Parisian families in the service of the court. A band of riotous undergraduates, including Villon, uprooted it, carried it off, and set it up in the university quarter, where they danced and sang ribald songs round it. The attempt of the civic authorities to recover it led to tumult and even to bloodshed, and Parliament had to intervene. The translation offered was suggested by the struggles that arise from time to time between the Faculties in some of our provincial universities for the possession of some treasured mascot. That at Liverpool is known as 'Sister Jane,' and the fight for her possession a few years ago waxed so hot that it threatened to embroil civic and university authorities, though trouble was nipped in the bud by the intervention of a dignified city councillor.

CHANTICLEER

The Merseyside university produced no poet capable of celebrating this notable event in fitting verse, but with the loss of Villon's romance of the *Pet au Deable* has disappeared what must have been the finest example ever written of undergraduate wit, humour, grim irony, and licentious language. Characteristic in this same stanza is Villon's sardonic reference to Guy Taberie's truthfulness, for, as told above, it was the latter's outspokenness in his cups that led to the discovery of Villon as one of the authors of the notorious burglary at the Collège de Navarre.

(35)

BALLADE THAT VILLON MADE ON THE REQUEST OF HIS MOTHER
FOR A PRAYER TO OUR LADY

Lady of Heaven, Regent on earth below,
And Empress of Inferno's marshy plain,
Take me, who humbly pay my Christian vow,
That I may count with those whom you ordain,
Though by no merit I thereto attain.
Your virtues, O my Queen and my Mistress,
Are greater far than is my wickedness,
And without them no soul can reach the sky;
So I aver, being no false prophetess.
In the which faith I fain would live and die.

That I am His, give Him your Son to know;
May He blot out my sins, and grace again
As on thy Egyptian, so on me bestow,
Like ^Wophilus, that priest profane,
To Mas free, cleared of his guilty stain,
Who me Satan he did once profess.
Kinder I like him should c'er transgress,
The chil^{ho} bore in purity
He saved high at Mass our souls to bless—
And ther aith I fain would live and die.
Wherfor
Some joy n I, and well I trow
Item, I giv^o read were labour vain;
And Legend when to church I go,
The which h harps and lutes, is painted plain,

And Hell, with damned souls in boiling pain;
 This gives me fear, that joy and cheerfulness.
 Give me such joy to have, high-born Goddess,
 To whom should sinners all for refuge fly,
 Faithful, sincere, quit of all slothfulness,
 In the which faith I fain would live and die.

Envoi

Virgin, whom we revere, you bore, Princess,
 Jesus the King, whose name shall ne'er grow less.
 Lord of all might, He endured our feebleness,
 Left Heaven, and found for us the remedy,
 Offering to Death His dear young loveliness.
 None else our Lord, and Him I so confess.
 In the which faith I fain would live and die.

The second verse of this prayer to Our Lady contains reference to St. Mary of Egypt, who turned saint from courtesan, and Theophilus, the monk who, like Faust, sold himself to Satan, in order to win promotion in his holy calling. These legends were the subject of two of the most remarkable of Rutebeuf's works, probably familiar to Villon, and were favourite subjects for the decoration of Romanesque and Gothic churches, either in sculpture or in the coloured glass of windows. The story of Theophilus figures twice in stone at Notre-Dame, in glass at Laon, and in one or the other elsewhere; but the most remarkable presentation of his legend is perhaps that on a bas-relief at Souillac in the Dordogne. Of St. Mary the Egyptian there is a naïve statue at St. Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris, and also a representation of her legend in a window.

Of the ballades which Villon wrote without incorporating them in his *Greater Testament* the outstanding one is that which he composed in expectation of being hanged. By common consent he attained in this the very pinnacle of his art, and no poet has written lines more sombre, more human, more moving, and more powerful—lines that must have been written by one who had plumbed the depths of vice and misery, and who, in a moment of intensity, was yet capable of soaring into the empyrean. Here is a version of it which has at least the merit of keeping close to the original:

(36)

BALLADE THAT VILLON MADE IN EXPECTATION OF BEING
HANGED WITH HIS COMPANIONS

O brother men, who live when we are dead,
Keep not your hearts against us hardened so,
For, if on our poor souls a tear you shed,
Sooner will God His grace on you bestow.
You see us, five or six, hanged in a row;
As for our flesh, once fed luxuriously,
'Tis long devoured and rotted, as you see,
And we, mere bones, in dust and ashes fall.
Let no one mock us in our misery;
But pray to God that He forgive us all!

And if we call you, brothers, be it not said
That, since from Justice came the fatal blow,
You scorn us. Sure, there's not in each man's head
Store of sound sense to guide him; this ye know.
Plead for us, since we're gone where dead men go,
With Him, the Virgin Mary's Son, that He
May keep for us His mercy flowing free,
And save us, whom the fires of Hell appal.
Harry us not: we're dead! So let us be,
But pray to God that He forgive us all!

The rain has soaked and washed us, every shred,
The sun has dried and blackened us now,
The crows have dug our eyes from out their bed,
From beard and eyebrows pluckt the hairs also.
No rest is ours, no rest; but to and fro,
Worse pitted than a tailor's thimble, we,
The pecked of birds, swing here continually,
As shifting winds hither and thither call.
For the which cause join not our company,
But pray to God that He forgive us all!

Envoy

Prince Jesus, who dost hold the world in fee,
Grant not that Hell win o'er us mastery;

With Hell, O Lord, be our account but small.
 Men, this is not a time for mockery;
 But pray to God that He forgive us all!

By way of relief from this grim utterance let us revert to the *Greater Testament*, and read the versions of two poignant and beautiful rondeaux that appear in it:

(37)

Death, I denounce thy cruel dart;
 Thou hast my mistress snatched from me,
 And showest still no clemency
 Except I languish in my smart:
 Since when my force and strength depart;
 But how could she in life hurt thee,
 Death?

Twain were we and had but one heart;
 If that be dead, so must I be,
 Or lifeless live like saints we see
 In choirs, carved by the mason's art,
 Death!

(38)

When I return from durance vile,
 Where I have left my life well nigh,
 If Fortune looks at me awry,
 Judge how she vents on me her bile!
 It seems to me she well might smile
 Whom reason's plea should satisfy,
 When I return.

But if she still be full of guile
 And wills that I die utterly,
 God grant that in His house on high
 My soul be quit of her aye-while,
 When I return!

Finally, here is a version of the epitaph, terminating in a rondeau, which fitly finds its place near the end of the poem:

CHANTICLEER

(39)

EPITAPH

Here lies and sleeps in garret low
 One whom love's dart has stricken dead,
 A poor, wee scholar years ago,
 One François Villon, be it said.
 Off land of his he never fed.
 He gave you all he had, ye know,
 His tables, benches, baskets, bread:
 Gay lads, sing this for him now sped:

Repose eternal give to him,
 Lord God, and light perpetual,
 Who never had the wherewithal
 Fills bowl and platter to the brim.
 As men a turnip peel or trim,
 Shorn was he, head, beard, eyebrows all.

Repose eternal give to him.
 Exiled he was by judges grim;
 They kicked his rump and garr'd him fall
 Though 'I appeal' was aye his call,
 In language plain, no pedant's whim.
 Repose eternal give to him.

CHAPTER III

THE RENAISSANCE

THE passage from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century in French literature is like the change from winter to spring. The chill and gloom and blackness of the times in which Villon lived, like the dead winter season of which he writes:

When upon wind the wolves are fed,
And for the rigour of the time
One hugs the hearth from none to prime,¹

are in strange contrast to the atmosphere of warmth and radiance that enveloped Ronsard, the next great poet of France, by the middle of the sixteenth century. Even the thought of death, never absent from the heart of French poetry, which to Villon was the last agony of man in all its horror, induced but a mild melancholy, typified by the fading of a flower, in the minds of Ronsard and his school. And French poetry, frozen so long in artificial moulds, burst out and flowered into new and luxuriant forms, with a range of expression, which in fullness, in grace, and in music, has rarely been equalled.

For the prime cause of this new and prodigious development we have to go back to the middle of the fifteenth century and the epoch-making invention of printing. This was soon followed by the capture of Constantinople by the Turks and the break-up of the Byzantine Empire, with the great diffusion of classical learning, and particularly of the literature of Greece, that naturally followed. Books were rapidly multiplied, the number of men who read for themselves increased, and the number of those who thought for themselves, with the result that much of the scholasticism and superstition of the Middle Ages was shaken off like a cloak. The sombre challenge, *memento mori*, yielded place with many to the exhilarating call, *memento vivere*. Italy, both at Rome and in its flourishing city-states, was the first to reap the harvest of the new learning. But France was soon to

¹ J. Payne's translation.

catch the enthusiasm of what then seemed a golden prime, and to drink long draughts of the beauty and the wisdom and the poetry of a pre-Christian world. And the pioneer was not to be a poet, but the great Rabelais himself, born at Chinon near the end of the fifteenth century, and whose prose epics of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* mirror the France of his time. He was a man of immense learning, successively monk, priest, wandering scholar, physician, lecturer, priest again, and, above all, author of works, which for all their coarseness and even buffoonery are such prodigies of humour and learning, and instinct with such a gusto for the good things of life, as to stand out among the everlasting triumphs of French genius.

As the Crusades had been intellectually fruitful in bringing together men of all European cultures, so did the Renaissance, and more markedly, provide a common ground for all humanists and scholars whatever their origin. In the sixteenth century contacts between Great Britain and France were close, and if we were still heavily in France's debt we were beginning in a small measure to repay our debts. Of English humanists the most conspicuous in French eyes was the great figure of Sir Thomas More, of whom Rabelais borrowed freely; and from the general attitude of Frenchmen to More, it is quite impossible to believe, as some would have it, that he was the 'great English scholar' ridiculed by Rabelais in his second book under the name of Thaumastes.

Second only to More comes Thomas Linacre of Oxford, equally famous as physician and scholar. Linacre himself had studied Greek under that dazzling Italian scholar, Politian, and to him in turn came More and Erasmus for instruction in the language. Of his Latin textbooks edition after edition was published in France, where it is odd to discover a treatise on arithmetic of English origin a popular textbook, for, in speaking of Gargantua's education, Rabelais in Book I, Chapter XXIII, names Tunstal, Bishop of Durham, its author. Rabelais pays Linacre himself an equivocal compliment in one of his coarser passages, when he tells the wholly apocryphal story of a visit of Villon to our Edward V, in the course of which, addressing the king, he refers to Linacre as 'your learned physician.'

But a more widespread influence on France from our side of the Channel came later than Linacre or More in the person of

George Buchanan, the greatest of Scottish humanists, and among the best of late Latin poets. Buchanan indeed for many years of his life became a real Frenchman by adoption. Lecturer at the Collège de Gienne at Bordeaux, rector of the Collège de Boncour, tutor in the household of the Marshal de Brissac, a traveller welcomed wherever he set foot, he became a warm friend of a host of Frenchmen of high rank, and of poets and scholars, including the great J. C. Scaliger. His poetry was admired by the poets of the Pleiad, of whom Du Bellay dedicated a sonnet to him; while Montaigne, prince of essayists, claims, in his essay on 'Education', Buchanan, whom he calls 'the great poet of Scotland,' among his tutors, and boasts that he played with success the chief parts in his Latin plays at the Collège de Gienne.

But notwithstanding these contacts between England and France in the early days of the Renaissance, which certainly had their influence on Rabelais, English poetry was still of small account in France. Chaucer, indeed, in his day, was regarded as a promising offshoot from a French stem, *grant translateur*, as Deschamps called him; and Clément Marot, an exact contemporary of Rabelais, and the chief French poet of the first half of the sixteenth century, who must be regarded as the link between Villon and Ronsard, was less directly influenced by the new learning than Rabelais. Naturally, for as a poet he was steeped in the *Romance of the Rose* and Villon, in the old learning rather than the new, and yet he could not fail to drink in draughts of the new atmosphere in which he moved. Marot, of Norman ancestry, was born in 1497, and lived through the reigns of the weak but kindly Louis XII, son of the poet, Charles d'Orléans, and the brilliant but reckless Francis I, whose name is always associated with our Henry VIII through the magnificence of their friendly meeting on the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

It is curious to reflect how the kings of France, so soon after the end of the terrible Hundred Years' War, and when the subtle brain and masterful though spider-like policy of Louis XI, the halting, sombre, superstitious figure that dominates the scene in Scott's *Quentin Durward*, seemed to have abolished the reign of feudalism, and to have established the kingdom of France on a basis of absolutism, repeated the blunder of their English rivals. Just as our English kings instead of fostering their own dominions at home wasted our manhood and wealth in the vain effort to

CHANTICLEER

maintain their shadowy claim to the throne of France, so did Louis XII and Francis I, with a rich and glorious kingdom of their own, now in the sixteenth century, invite disaster in the foolhardy enterprise of gaining a firm foothold in Italy.

In 1524 Clément Marot, who had early obtained a position at court, accompanied Francis on the fatal expedition into Italy where the poet was wounded and captured in the defeat at Pavia. He soon returned to France, and thenceforward devoted himself to poetry. He was, no doubt, well read in Latin, and he was also influenced by Italian, but his chief claim to scholarship lies in his knowledge of the earlier poetry of his own country; and he is greatly to be honoured for the editions he published both of the *Romance of the Rose* and of Villon's works. A most facile versifier on his own account, he poured out a stream of verse which, without neglecting medieval forms altogether, was more free, more elastic, and more varied than any poetry yet known. His vast output of occasional verse contained much in the way of licentious epigram, but he developed a strong religious side, and his translations of the Psalms, some of which are quite excellent, brought him under suspicion of heresy, and he had to flee the country, first to Geneva, not a congenial atmosphere for him, and then to the north of Italy, where he died in 1544.

A striking illustration of the varieties of thought and religious opinion which existed during the intellectual turmoil of the early Renaissance may be found in Dean Kitchin's assertion that it is not improbable that in 1528 Loyola, Rabelais, and Calvin were in Paris together.

As a specimen of Clément Marot's work at its most graceful we may offer a version of one of his songs:

(40)

SONG

Who seeks the happiness
 That one kind glance can give
 Must meet with my mistress—
 God grant her long to live!
 Such is her tender grace,
 That even the sight of her
 A thousand griefs would chase,
 Or more, if more there were.

Marvellous to mine eyes
 My fair one's virtues seem;
 When thoughts of her arise
 My heart stirs in a dream.
 Her beauty sovereign
 Would make me swoon to death,
 Did not her bounty deign
 To guard my fleeting breath.

And here is an artful epigram on himself:

(41)

EPIGRAM ON HIMSELF

I cannot as I was abide,
 And never again shall I be young;
 My lovely spring and summertide
 Are through an open window sprung.
 O Love, my master here on earth,
 Fore other gods I've done thy will;
 Could I but have a second birth,
 How I would serve thee better still!

On the sterner side he may be illustrated by his epigram on the execution of Samblançay, superintendent of finances under Francis I, who had been falsely accused of embezzlement:

(42)

THE JUDGE AND THE CONDEMNED

When Maillart, judge of Hell, led Samblançay
 Up to Montfalcon's gibbet, there to die,
 Which of the two in your opinion, pray,
 Looked best his part? To help you let me try.
 'Twas Maillart seemed the man whom death was nigh,
 While Samblançay appeared so stout of heart,
 You might feel sure his hand the noose would tie
 That on Montfalcon's height should hang Maillart.

The most direct influence of Marot is to be detected in a school of poetry that before the middle of the century grew up in the wealthy city of Lyons which, as a half-way house between Italy

and Paris, had early developed a cultured society. One of the younger poets of that school, and the most famous, was a woman, Louise Labé, born in 1526, whom some critics claim to be the greatest poetess France has produced. Certainly she was a very remarkable personality. Known as *La Belle Cordière*, she was the daughter of one rich ropemaker and the wife of another. In her romantic youth she donned armour, like another Joan of Arc, and rode in the suite of the Dauphin to the siege of Perpignan.

Her poetical output was not large, and consists of elegies and a number of sonnets. Some of these sonnets are of astonishing excellence; indeed a peculiarly Shakespearian quality has been claimed for them. However this may be, the poems of this young woman, almost an exact contemporary of Ronsard, have a passionately human touch, a personal, modern thrill, which you will not match in all the sonnets of either Ronsard or his friend, Du Bellay. Thus in her confession of a woman's hopes and disappointments and passion addressed to the ladies of Lyons she ends with a call to Love:

Mais si tu veus que j'ayme jusqu'au bout,
 Fay que celui que j'estime mon tout,
 Qui seul me peut faire plorer et rire,
 Et pour lequel si souvent je soupire,
 Sente en ses os, en son sang, en son ame,
 Ou plus ardente, ou bien egale flame.
 Alors ton faix plus aisé me sera,
 Quand avec moy quelcun le portera.

If I must nurse a love beyond recall
 Grant thou that he whom I account my all,
 He who alone can make me laugh or cry,
 For whom, alas, so oftentimes I sigh,
 Feel in his bones, and blood, and soul, a fire
 Ardent as mine, or burning even higher.
 Then easier shall I find thy load to bear
 When by my side stands one its weight to share.

Those who are familiar with Christina Rossetti's famous sonnet entitled *Remember* will find a kinship with it in the two sonnets of Louise Labé, versions of which follow, the inspiration of them

being perhaps her love for Olivier de Magny, one of Ronsard's protégés. The feminine note rings through Louise Labé's sonnets as through that of Christina Rossetti—the feminine note to appreciate which you have only to listen to the prouder, less unselfish, less resigned, masculine note to be heard in Shakespeare's sonnet lxxi.

(43)

So soon as I have laid me wearily
On my soft bed to find my longed-for rest,
My troubled spirit steals from out my breast
And flies incontinent where you may be.

Ah! then it seems that I hold close to me,
On my soft bosom what I love the best,
What I have hoped for, sighed for, so distrest
I've thought my heart would break for agony.

O gentle sleep, and night my comforter!
O sweet repose, that smooths away all care,
Nightly this dream to my closed eyes admit;

And if true happiness may never stir
In waking hours the poor fond heart I bear,
Now let me clasp at least its counterfeit.

(44)

While from my streaming eyes the tears can fall,
In fond regret, for moments spent with thee;
And o'er my sobs I can win mastery
And make thee hear a voice however small;

While I can bid my hand thy charm recall
And from my little lute pluck melody;
While in my heart I can contented be
With but one wish, to know thee all in all;

I have no weak desire that I may die:
But when of tears I feel mine eyes run dry,
My voice grow feeble, and my fingers tire,

CHANTICLEER

And when my heart, pent in this house of clay,
 Can show no glimmer more of passion's fire,
 I'll pray that Death may cloud my brightest day.

When we come to Ronsard we are launched on the full tide of the Renaissance in French literature. It is difficult to recall a name that signifies more in the way of achievement. One of the most fascinating, most illuminating studies of any period is Mr. Hilaire Belloc's on the poetry of the French Renaissance, with its happy title *Avril*, which conveys in a single word all the gaiety, the light, the colour, and the scent of spring. When he comes to treat of Ronsard himself he leads off with a passage so fine and so true that one may be excused for appropriating it. 'If it be true,' he says, 'that words create for themselves a special atmosphere, and that their mere sound calls up vague outer things beyond their strict meaning, so it is true that the names of the great poets by their mere sound, by something more than the recollection of their work, produce an atmosphere corresponding to the quality of each; and the name of Ronsard throws about itself like an aureole the characters of fecundity, of leadership, and of fame.'

Prince of Poets, as he was called, Ronsard was born on the banks of the Loire, near Vendôme, in 1524. He came of good family, and entered court life at the age of ten. When Madeleine of France, daughter of Francis I, married in 1537 James V of Scotland, Ronsard, then a boy of twelve, went in her train to Scotland, and spent two years in Edinburgh, where a Scottish gentleman initiated him in the study of Virgil and Horace. Clearly his interest in classical learning must have begun early. In later youth he accompanied French ambassadors to England, Flanders, Holland, and Germany. But when about twenty he was attacked by serious illness, and though he recovered he was left with a permanent deafness which unfitted him for the active life for which he was destined. Hence he turned his thoughts to literature, and devoted himself for years under Daurat, a distinguished scholar of the day, to the study of the classics, the new learning that had so lately dawned on the world. Among his fellow-students were Du Bellay, Belleau, Baïf, and others.

The enthusiastic band of young scholars formed a coterie of

seven, to which was given the name of the Pleiad, after an Alexandrian constellation of seven tragic poets, who flourished in the third century B.C. They set themselves by the ardent study of Greek and Latin to reform the French language, and found on classical models a literature which might rival those of Greece and Rome. They were saved from pedantry, and the dull industry of the copyist, by the intellectual excitement that fired them, and the deep affection they felt for their own language, and their pride in the possibilities of a new culture of which it should be the mouthpiece. They were kept fresh by their passionate love for natural beauty, which made them revel in the joys of the countryside, each in that particularly of his own native soil.

In 1549 Du Bellay published their manifesto in the shape of a *Défense et Illustration de la Langue française*, a work which, though largely modelled on an Italian original, set out fully their aims in relation to French. These were largely realized; they did succeed in enriching their language, not only with words and expressions derived from Greek and Latin, but also from the picturesque speech of the countryside and of the arts and crafts, while they developed not only new metres but new rhythms as well, and a smooth fluency which involved no loss of dignity. Indeed, they made French the language that we know, and to realize fully what their achievement was we have only to compare the French they wrote with that of Clément Marot and Rabelais, with both of whom they were younger contemporaries. One verse-form of an artificial character they did affect, viz. the sonnet, and of this they produced several long sequences, among which Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Hélène*¹ and Du Bellay's *Antiquités de Rome*, for all its borrowings from Latin, old and new, stand out pre-eminent. Du Bellay's *Antiquités de Rome*, indeed, is admitted into the select company of the great sonnet sequences of literature, while of single sonnets it may be claimed that the most famous and best-loved of all ever written is Ronsard's *Quand vous serez bien vieille*, in the series to Helen, of which a version will presently be given.

But we should be doing Ronsard as man and poet an injustice if we confined ourselves too closely to the strict limits of this book

¹ A free translation of the whole of this series has recently been published by Mr. Humbert Wolfe..

and confined ourselves to the illustration of his sonnets, odes, and lyrical verse by which he is best known. He wrote as well a great quantity of poetry of more serious intention. His epic, the *Franciade*, written in glorification of a French royalty of mythical Trojan ancestry, is by general consent a failure, a dull exercise in rhetoric rather than poetry, written in cramped, decasyllabic verse instead of the alexandrines of which he was so easy a master. But when he threw himself into the controversies aroused by the wars of religion that broke out in his time he shows himself the grand poet that he was. He was strongly on the side of the Catholics against the Huguenots, for he conceived the struggle to be between authority, based upon reason and tradition, against what he terms 'opinion.'

His series of *Discours des Misères de ce temps*, though they are sometimes, like all controversial writing when read after the occasion for them has passed, of tedious length and at times positively choked with passion, contain passages of burning eloquence, almost irresistible argument, fine feeling, and urgent prayer for peace. For his picture of 'opinion' he draws on all the resources of his recollections of the descriptions by classic authors of Fama and Bellona; he attacks fiercely Wyclif and John Huss, Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, and, of course, Calvin; but he is fair-minded enough to realize how much of the trouble has been occasioned and is aggravated by abuses within the Church of Rome itself. Thus in the elegy he wrote following the tragedy of Amboise he appeals to the preachings of St. Paul, and cries:

Que diroit-il de voir l'Église à Jésus-Christ,
 Qui fut jadis fondée en humblesse d'esprit,
 En toute patience, en tout' obéissance,
 Sans argent, sans crédit, sans force, ny puissance,
 Pauvre, nue, exilée, ayant jusques aux os
 Les coups des fouets sanglans impriméz sur le dos;
 Et la voir aujourd'huy riche et de drap d'or?
 Toute pleine d'écus, de rente, grasse et hautaine,
 Ses ministres enflez, et ses Paix et de domaine?
 Pompeusement vestus de soye et de drap d'or?
 What would he say, to see the Church of Christ,
 Founded of old in humbleness of heart,
 Patient always, always obedient,

No silver, credit, strength, nor force of arms,
 Poor, naked, exiled, bleeding to the bone
 From lash of whip imprinted on the back ;
 To see her as to-day, rich, fat, and proud,
 Bulging with coin, with revenues and land ?
 Her ministers puffed up, ay, and her Popes
 Arrayed in pomp of silk and cloth of gold.

Indeed, there are outbursts in Ronsard's *Discours* that cannot be surpassed by anything in the *Tragiques* of Agrippa d'Aubigné, the great Huguenot poet, in whom M. Dorchain sees the precursor of the Hugo of the *Châtiments* and *L'Année terrible*.

Ronsard lived for over sixty years, and his production was immense. In his lifetime fame and popularity were his in profusion. But as in the case of many another great poet who wrote much, the bulk of his work cannot be read now without some feeling of weariness. Nevertheless, in almost everything he wrote one is thrilled now and again by the inimitable Ronsardian touch. Of such of his work as lives to-day in all its grace and charm, and can never die, we give but few examples, two of them the most familiar of his poems, of either of which it is perhaps a presumption to offer a rendering. But we may perhaps be permitted, first, to give in the original French one of the most exquisite of his little poems, based on Hadrian's dying address to his soul :

Animula, vagula, blandula,
 Hospes comesque corporis,
 Quae nunc abibis in loca
 Pallidula, rigida, nudula ;
 Nec, ut soles, dabis jocos ?

The jewel-like quality of this poem of Ronsard's makes it irresistible, but its free use of charming French diminutives, for which no fair equivalent can be found in English, renders it, like Eustache Deschamps's *Sui je, sui je, sui je belle*, quite untranslatable :

A SON AME

Amelette Ronsardelette,
 Mignonette, doucelette,
 Tres-chere hostesse de mon corps,

CHANTICLEER

Tu descens là bas foiblelette,
 Pasle, maigrelette, seulette,
 Dans le froid royaume des mors ;

 Toutefois simple, sans remors
 De meurtre, poison, et rancune,
 Mesprisant faveurs et tresors

 Tant enviez par la commune.
 Passant, j'ai dit : tuy ta fortune,
 Ne trouble mon repos : je dors.

We now offer a version of that most famous of his sonnets to which allusion has already been made, and for this version perhaps this much may be claimed, viz. that it does keep close to the original :

(45)

When you are old and near the hearth's warm blaze
 You wind and spin by candle-light at eve,
 Singing my songs you 'll say, and scarce believe :
 Ronsard once loved to hymn my beauty's praise.

No maid that hears the words her mistress says,
 Though half asleep the toilsome thread she weave,
 But, starting at my name, will cease to grieve,
 Blessing your name now crowned with deathless bays.

I shall be underground ; a formless ghost,
 Mid myrtle shades I 'll keep my quiet post :
 You 'll crouch in eld and watch the fire-light play,

 My love regretting and your cruel scorn.
 Live now, I charge you, wait not for the morn :
 Gather Life's roses while 'tis yet to-day.

There follows a version of an ode scarcely less well known than the foregoing sonnet :

(46)

Mignon, come let us seek the rose
 In morning light we saw disclose
 Her robe of crimson to the sun ;

Has she not lost at eventide
 Her robe's smooth folds in crimson dyed,
 And the soft bloom like yours she won?

Ah, see within how short a space,
 Mignonne, she falleth from her place,
 Alas, her beauties disarrayed!
 O cruel step-dame, Nature, why
 Should flower so fair so early die,
 Unfold at dawn, at even fade?

Then, if you trust me fair, Mignonne,
 While youth's gay flourish still is on
 And thrills you with the green of spring,
 Enjoy, enjoy your girlhood's prime!
 As with this flower, old age in time
 Will ruin on your beauty bring.

Finally, here is a version of another of his loveliest sonnets which well illustrates the point raised earlier, how the thought of death which to Villon was man's last agony seemed but to affect Ronsard and his school with the mild melancholy occasioned by the fading of a flower:

(47)

Lo, on her slender branch, the rose of May,
 In lovely youth, in her first blossoming hour!
 The sky grows jealous of the glowing flower
 That tearful dawn waters at break of day.

Grace nestles in her cup, with love to stay,
 Perfuming garden-plot and shady bower:
 But dashed by rain, or the fell dog-star's power,
 Languishing leaf by leaf she fades away.

And so with thee: in thy young loveliness,
 When earth and sky alike thy beauty bless,
 Struck down by fate must thou in dust repose.

For obsequies receive my tears like showers,
 This bowl of milk, this basket full of flowers,
 That, quick or dead, thy body rest a rose.

Joachim du Bellay, born in 1525, undoubtedly the second in rank of the Pleiad, came like Ronsard of good family, and from the same rich countryside, the watershed of the Loire with its wide, open, sunny spaces drained by the most leisurely and luxurious of the great French rivers. It was at an inn near Poitiers that in 1547 he first met Ronsard, and thenceforward they worked together like brothers in their patriotic efforts for the glory of their country's literature. Two of Du Bellay's kinsmen, Guillaume du Bellay and his younger brother Jean, the cardinal, were men of high distinction, indeed the ablest diplomats in the service of Francis I. Guillaume du Bellay was a patron of Rabelais, who twice speaks of him in terms of reverence, and gives a moving account of his death of which he may have been an eye-witness. In 1553 the cardinal took his young kinsman, the poet, in his train to Rome. There Joachim spent over four years, though he was not happy in the life he led. The papal throne was occupied for the first half of his stay in Rome by the notorious Julius III, of whom Olivier de Magny, a brother poet of the Pleiad, wrote the bitter lines:

Il laisse à son trespas d'un chacun en tous lieux
Sans complaintes la bouche et sans larmes les yeux,
Tant a esté sa vie à chacun détestable
Et tant est ceste mort à chacun profitable.

No one on all this earth was left when he lay dead
With either voice to mourn, or eyes a tear to shed,
So loathed he was by all as long as he drew breath,
And such advantages all purchased by his death.

As secretary to the cardinal the poet saw too much of the detestable intrigue that then enveloped the papal court, and as manager of the cardinal's household he was plagued by the worries of finding money to meet his master's heavy expenditure. And there was a trouble of his own, his love for a Roman lady, married to an old and jealous husband, the lady who figures as Faustine in the Latin poems in which the poet spoke more frankly of his love than in his own language. On his return to France he published two series of sonnets composed or thought out in Rome; in his *Regrets* he reveals the torment of homesickness that came over him abroad, and there, as in the masterly series

in which he dilates on the fallen glories of Rome, he gives expression to the deepest note of melancholy to be found in all the poetry of his school. That great scholar and critic, George Saintsbury, has been charged with falling at times into a slovenliness of style, but at his highest he rises to a pitch as high as any of his confrères have ever reached, as when, e.g., he speaks of ‘that inebriating wine of poetical melancholy which the Renaissance had the secret of pressing from the eternal vineyard,’ and continues: ‘Of this Melancholia—the real Tenth Muse, and one of the greatest inspirers of poetry—Du Bellay is perhaps the high priest in French.’

Even on his return to France Du Bellay was not altogether happy; he gradually lost his distinguished kinsman’s favour, ill health dogged him, deafness afflicted him, as it did both Ronsard and Belleau, and in 1560, at the early age of thirty-five, he died—when Edmund Spenser, his great English admirer, who was to translate his Roman sonnets, was yet a child.

Du Bellay’s career was thus cut short, and his figure does not loom as large as Ronsard’s, but, even if others cannot attain to what we have ventured to call the inimitable Ronsardian touch, Du Bellay for sustained and dignified excellence probably ranks in the eyes of posterity quite as his equal. Would that it had been possible to give here examples from his *Jeux rustiques* of his poems in lighter vein! His epitaphs on two of his domestic pets, Peloton, a little dog, and Belaud, his cat, have certainly no superior among all exercises in a fascinating, delicate art. We offer, first, the version of a sonnet from the sequence *In Praise of Olive*, generally said to be the anagram of the name of a certain Mlle de Viole, but more probably his cousin, and early love, Olive de Sévigné. It may be interesting to compare it with the last quoted sonnet of Ronsard’s, for the nominal subject of both is the rose, in poetry the undisputed queen of flowers, and by no poets more worshipped than by those of the Pleiad:

(48)

THE ROSE OF DAWN

Whoe’er has seen the rose at dawn of day
 Steeped in the honeyed liquor of the sky,
 When shimmering red and white together vie
 Within the flower poised on her artless spray;

He will have seen how all things own her sway
 And favour her; the trampling foot goes by;
 No violating hand has yet drawn nigh;
 And even the oxen dare not come her way.

But ravished from the stem on which she grew,
 Faded the freshness of her lovely hue,
 She's scorned by men on earth and gods sublime.

Alas, one seeketh now my rose to mar,
 And what can I but worship her afar,
 Though vain my verse, in cunning-simple rhyme?

Those who are curious to trace the classical or Italian originals that suggested this or that turn of thought or expression to the receptive minds of the poets of the French Renaissance will find how much this sonnet owes to the most glorious of all Catullus's poems, lines 40-7 of the *Hymen o Hymenae!* or to Ariosto's lovely paraphrase of the passage in the *Orlando Furioso*, i. 42-3.

Next we give a version of Du Bellay's most famous poem, the little ode of the *Winnower to the Winds*. Despite the danger of attempting any rendering in English of a work of art so exquisitely light and airy, we are tempted to make the effort because no better example can be given of the spirit and method of much of the Pleiad's work. We have stated how Ronsard and his school founded themselves on the study of Greek and Latin. Though the Pleiad did much in the way of actual translation, Du Bellay claimed that what was wanted was not merely translations, but poems in the French language and in French rhythms in imitation of classical models, conveying the atmosphere, the sentiment, and the feel of the originals rather than the letter and the form. The original of this ode of Du Bellay's is to be found in the following lines of Navagero, one of the graceful neo-Latin poets who flourished in Italy:

Auræ quæ levibus percurritis aera pennis,
 Et strepitis blando per nemora alta sono;
 Serta dat haec vobis, vobis haec rusticus Idmon
 Spargit odorato plena' canistra croco.
 Vos lenite aestum, et paleas sejungite inanes,
 Dum medio fruges ventilat ille die.

And here is our version of what Du Bellay has made of them:

(49)

THE WINNOWER TO THE WINDS

To you, troop of the air,
Who round the wide world fare
 On wing so fugitive,
And to the shady trees,
Stirred by your lightest breeze,
 A lisping murmur give,

I offer violets,
Lilies and these flowerets,
 And roses gathered near,
Roses of vermeil hue,
Scarce blown when fell the dew,
 And these carnations here.

With your sweet breath all day
Sweep through this house, I pray,
 Sweep o'er these fields of wheat;
While on the winnowing floor
I toil, and pant so sore
 In the fierce noon-tide heat.

Walter Pater, who in the seventies of the last century preached, as no one else, the gospel of the high Renaissance, said of this poem of Du Bellay's: 'Du Bellay has almost been the poet of one poem; and this one poem of his is an Italian thing transplanted into that green country of Anjou; out of the Latin verses of Andrea Navagero, into French; . . . and the form of the poem as it stands, written in old French, is all Du Bellay's own. . . .' And he goes on to say that the poem 'has in the highest degree the qualities, the value, of the whole Pleiad school of poetry, of the whole phase of taste from which that school derives, a certain silvery grace of fancy, nearly all the pleasure of which is in the surprise at the happy and dexterous way in which a thing slight in itself is handled.' That is finely said, but the truth of it is far from the whole truth. There is a deeper note in Du Bellay, and indeed in others of his school.

No one to-day would dare to suggest that Du Bellay was the poet of one poem. Take the following three sonnets from the *Antiquities of Rome*. The translations we offer call for no apology. They are by our own Edmund Spenser, and afford a happy illustration of how at this period just as the French borrowed from the Italian, so our Elizabethans borrowed from French and Italian alike. For it is one of the glories of the Renaissance that it brought about in Europe an inter-communion of poets, artists, and scholars, with no sentimental twang of internationalism about it, such as to-day the League of Nations' Committee for Intellectual Co-operation may well envy.

(50)¹

Thou stranger, which for Rome in Rome here seekest,
 And nought of Rome in Rome perceiv'st at all,
 These same olde walls, olde arches, which thou seest,
 Olde palaces, is that which Rome men call.
 Beholde what wreake, what ruine, and what wast,
 And how that she, which with her mighty powre
 Tam'd all the world, hath tam'd herselue at last;
 The pray of Time, which all things doth devowre!
 Rome now of Rome is th' onely funerall,
 And onely Rome of Rome hath victorie;
 Ne ought save Tyber hastning to his fall
 Remaines of all: O worlds inconstancie!
 That which is firme doth flit and fall away,
 And that is flitting doth abide and stay.

(51)²

Such as the Berecynthian Goddessc bright,
 In her swifte charret with high turrets crownde,
 Proud that so manie Gods she brought to light;
 Such was this Citic in her good daies fownd:
 This Citic, more than that great Phrygian mother

¹ Du Bellay's sonnet is itself virtually a translation from an Italian late-Latin original.

² See Virgil's *Aeneid*, vi. 784:

... qualis Berecynthia mater
 Invehitur curru Phrygias turrita per urbes,
 Laeta deum partu, centum complexa nepotes,
 Omnes caelicolas, omnes supra alta tenentes.

Renowm'd for fruite of famous progenie,
 Whose greatnes by the greatnes of none other,
 But by her selfe, her equall match could see:
 Rome onely might to Rome compared bee,
 And onely Rome could make great Rome to tremble:
 So did the Gods by heavenly doome decree,
 That other earthlie power should not resemble
 Her that did match the whole earths puissaunce,
 And did her courage to the heavens advaunce.

(52)

He that hath seene a great Oke drie and dead
 Yet clad with reliques of some Trophees olde,
 Lifting to heaven her aged hoarie head,
 Whose foote in ground hath left but feeble holde,
 But halfe disbowel'd lies above the ground,
 Shewing her wreathed rootes, and naked armes,
 And on her trunke all rotten and unsound
 Onely supports herselfe for meate of wormes;
 And though she owe her fall to the first winde,
 Yet of the devout people is ador'd,
 And manie yong plants spring out of her rinde;
 Who such an Oke hath seene, let him record
 That such this Cities honour was of yore,
 And mongst all Cities florished much more.

Of the remaining poets of the Renaissance the two outstanding ones are Remi Belleau and J. A. de Baif, probably the two most distinguished scholars of the Pleiad. Remi Belleau was born in 1528, at Nogent-le-Rotrou, a small town some forty miles southwest of Chartres, and thus like Ronsard and Du Bellay breathed in youth, though more remotely, the atmosphere of the rich watershed of the Loire; and, curiously enough, like them he became a victim to deafness. In the train of René de Lorraine, Marquis d'Elbeuf, he saw military service in an expedition to Naples. But on his return from Naples the marquis appointed him tutor to his son, Charles, whom Belleau educated so well as to make him a real patron of art and letters, with the result that in the household of this illustrious family he lived until his death in 1577, in undisturbed enjoyment of leisure for his studies and his poetry.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the volume of his work is immense. His translation of Anacreon was the first to appear in France, and in the line of translation or adaptation he wrote also paraphrases of Ecclesiastes and of the Song of Solomon. Among his original work, some of it under Italian influence, one comedy, *La Reconnue*, a souvenir of Terence, stands to his credit. But his two great works were his *Amours et Nouveaux Échanges des pierres précieuses*, and *La Bergerie*. The former is well worth study, for it is full of exquisite poetry. Now you get a perfect little ode addressed to a particular jewel, such as the diamond or pearl, now you get a princess or some loved woman hymned in guise of a jewel, now a fable or legend, such as that of the nymph Améthyste changed into a stone by Diana to save her from Bacchus and his troop, and then by the god in his grief baptized, not with his tears, but with the juice of the purple grape; or the loves of Iris and Opalle, shepherd of Neptune's flock, whom Juno's messenger, when her wrathful mistress turns her lover into stone, tinges with the iridescent colours of her tears. *La Bergerie* is an immense compilation in mingled prose and verse, and cast in a pastoral form which becomes, it must be confessed, more strained and artificial as it proceeds. Some idea of its bulk and its variety may be gleaned from the fact that it contains eighteen songs, forty-six sonnets of a general character, forty-eight love sonnets, nine prayers, six eclogues, three odes, three epithalamia, three laments, two epitaphs, with twelve other poems, some of them of considerable length.

It is not perhaps surprising that Belleau's fecundity, facility, and brilliance have tempted some to claim for him the rank of first poet of the Pleiad, but greater qualities than those are to be found in the human touch vouchsafed to Ronsard and Du Bellay that made them great poets not of a time, but of all time. While he lived it was his *Pierres précieuses* that made Belleau most famous, and this work is enshrined in the wonderful epitaph Ronsard wrote for him, and which was carved on his tomb:

Ne taillez, mains industrieuses,
Des pierres pour couvrir Belleau:
Lui mesme a basti son tombeau
Dedans ses *Pierres précieuses*.

Of the mass of his poetry one single poem survives to win a

place in all anthologies, his famous *Song to April*, to be found near the beginning of *La Bergerie*, before the pastoral setting wears too thin. To attempt to give a translation of it within the compass of the original metre is to court failure; so many of the exquisite turns in the original are bound to be slurred over. But a really fine paraphrase of it is to be found in the reprint of Cary's *Early French Poets*, published in 1923 by A. M. Philpot Ltd., as No. II of the Campion reprints. T. Earle Welby's introduction does full justice to this pioneering work of Cary, one of the greatest of English translators, whose paraphrase of Belleau's poem certainly scores point after point of exact equivalence with the choicest expressions in the original, and gives us a poem with something of the flavour of Keats in it. But hardly inferior to the April ode, is the one to May which follows it, and whose comparative neglect may be due to the intrusion in it of five stanzas, which convert a song to May, full of delicious touches that indicate a wider and closer observation of nature than was common among the poets of the Pleiad, into a complimentary ode addressed to a brother-poet. Of this *Ode to May* we venture to offer a version, which omits the five extraneous stanzas:

(53)

ODE TO MAY

While in a course that never ends
 May to the old year vigour lends,
 And in the seasons takes her place;
 While man and earth and atmosphere
 Are thrilled again with right good cheer
 Beneath the sky's fresh youthful face:

And while the springtide's kindly spell
 Makes earth's fruit-bearing bosom swell
 In these most beautiful of days,
 And earth herself with flowers imprest,
 And by all balmy odours blest,
 Her features with new charms arrays:

While little swallows praises sing,
 Their little throats a-twittering,
 To May, the one all months among,

CHANTICLEER

And with that little tool, their beak,
 At work like little masons seek
 To build the cup that holds their young:

This month sweet Venus comes again,
 Young Love and all the sacred train
 Of Graces, Laughter and of Dance,
 To set alight within our veins
 The burning heat of amorous pains
 Eyes kindle in us with a glance.

What time in youth the slender vine,
 Nursing in secret her design
 To rear the grape in clusters green,
 Sends little feelers to embrace,
 And clinging tendrils to enlace
 A neighbour elm with her soft sheen:

And while the blunt-nosed little lambs
 Nibble the grass beside their dams,
 And, dancing on his feet, the kid
 Rubs hard his horn and leaps in air
 Before his mother, browsing there
 On the young shoots by boulders hid:

While perched upon the hawthorn-tree
 The nightingale sings silvery,
 Trilling a hundred melodies:
 And on her quivering winglets light
 The busy bee directs her flight
 Heath-ward where her pavilion lies:

While in the soil, watered again
 With dewy drip of cool soft rain,
 Earth's seedlings germinate and grow,
 And winds light as a Zephyr's lisp
 Caress the ships' white sails and crisp
 The surface of the sea below:

What time the tender turtle-dove,
 Pigeons and other birds of Love,
 Mate in this month fair as a dream,

And, with their little beaks' twin tips
 Taking by turns quick, little sips,
 Skim o'er the surface of a stream:

While Ceres' yellowing tresses, kist
 By slants of wind that curl and twist,
 With rippling lights are sunnied o'er,
 As when the billow's watery cave
 Breaking advances wave on wave
 At gallop on the sandy shore:

In short, while sea and land like one,
 This nether world's great torch, the sun,
 All take their pleasures in their turn,
 While birds in air make revelry,
 And even the fishes in the sea
 In pairs caught by Love's ardours burn:

Remember how the rose, our pride,
 That blooms from dawn to eventide,
 Loses her colour and her scent
 How thievish time will rend and soil
 What sweets the spring has left to spoil,
 Leaves, flower, and fruit, till all are spent.

Remember how old age will come,
 To bend our backs, our strength to numb,
 And make us totter on our way;
 And how grey hairs, and eyes sunk in,
 And wrinkled cheeks, and shrivelled skin,
 Will dog us all to our last day.

J. A. de Baif, born at Venice in 1532, was the natural son of Lazare de Baif, a man of culture and learning, and the ambassador of France, by a Venetian lady of good family. As Lazare de Baif was in orders marriage was impossible, but he acknowledged his son, and took infinite pains over his education, placing him under some of the most eminent scholars of the day. It has been stated that the precocious boy of eleven helped Ronsard, eight years older, in his early Greek studies. In later life he wrote freely

Latin poems, published numerous translations both from Greek and Latin, and produced several plays, including versions of Sophocles's *Antigone* and two comedies based on originals by Plautus and Terence. And, like Clément Marot and others, he indulged himself in translating the Psalms.

In Paris he enjoyed richly the royal favour, and founding in 1567 an Academy of Music and of Poetry, which some have claimed to be the prototype of the French Academy and the Paris Conservatoire, his house became a centre for the lovers of the two arts. He lived on to 1589, and, as in the case of Ronsard and Belleau, the mass of his French poetry is enormous. There is much variety in it, but the bulk of it is tedious to a degree, including his laborious and not unscholarly attempts to apply rules of quantity, as in classical metres, to French versification. But at his best he well deserves his place as one of the four chief poets of his age; witness these charming stanzas, from his *Amours de Mélina*:

(54)

So SWEET A ROSE

Did ever so sweet a rose
 In the light of morning fair
 So fresh a blossom disclose?
 No gillyflower can compare
 With the living crimson there,
 On thy lips that put to shame
 All colours the flowers may claim.

There 's no one has tasted yet
 A liquor so sweet to sup,
 By Dawn's rosy fingers set
 In the tender petalled cup,
 While still the green sap mounts up
 In the scented spring divine,
 As thy honeyed lips on mine.

I 've tasted the sugar'd flower
 Of the honeysuckle wild,
 And the store that hour by hour

The provident bee has piled,
But thy peerless kiss, my child,
The honeysuckle will shade
And the honey's savour fade.

Baif had another side to him, a sense of humour and a gift for satire. Of this some slight indication will be found in his *Epitaph on Rabelais*:

(55)

O Pluto, welcome Rabelais,
And mid the crowd that owns thy sway,
None of whom ever laughs at all,
Find one with laughter at his call.

Ronsard died in 1585, satiated, as he said himself, with fame. But the great work of the Pleiad was soon to be half undone. It may be that the temperamental outlook of the whole nation was changed as a result of the cruel series of civil wars, known as the Wars of Religion, which broke out in 1562 between Huguenots and Catholics. They were savagely conducted on both sides, though the horror which stands out in the memory of mankind is the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572; and they were not ended until several years after the accession in 1589 of Henry IV, Macaulay's 'King Henry of Navarre,' the hero of the battle of Ivry, whose final acceptance of Catholicism gave hopes at last of a united kingdom. 'Paris is well worth a mass,' said he.

But, in any case, the very success of the Pleiad was bound to provoke a reaction towards formalism; no poet, or school of poets, whatever the final verdict of history, is in the ascendant for more than one generation; in the third they are often either forgotten or denounced. Philippe Desportes (1546-1606), a follower of Ronsard, despite his elegance and ingenuity well illustrates the gradual failure of the Ronsardian tradition. Boileau's bitter lines in denunciation of Ronsard, which show a good, sound, common-sense critic at his worst, run as follows:

Ronsard qui le suivit, par une autre méthode
Réglant tout, brouilla tout, fit un art à sa mode,
Et toutefois longtemps eut un heureux destin.
Mais sa muse en Français parlant Grec et Latin

Vit dans l'âge suivant, par un retour grotesque,
 Tomber de ses grands mots le faste pédantesque.
 Ce poète orgueilleux, trébuché de si haut,
 Rendit plus retenus Desportes et Bertaut.

But it was certainly not because he was shocked by what Boileau calls Ronsard's 'pompous pedantry' that Desportes became more *retenu*; the causes were self-indulgence and lack of power. He may be regarded as the court poet of Henry III, the king concerned in two great crimes, the massacre of St. Bartholomew and the assassination of the Duc de Guise. The king heaped benefice after benefice on his favourite, a cleric merely by profession, who thought to make the best of both worlds. He was much admired by several of our Elizabethans, and A. H. Bullen, to whose fine taste and scholarship we owe so many discoveries in Elizabethan lyric, gives in his *Lyrics from Elizabethan Romances, etc.*, a translation by Thomas Lodge of one of his sonnets, which may be compared with those of Spenser from Du Bellay's *Antiquities of Rome*:

(56)

If so I seek the shades I suddenly do see
 The god of love forsake his bow and sit me by;
 If that I think to write, his Muses pliant be,
 If so I plain my grief the wanton boy will cry.

If I lament his pride he doth increase my pain;
 If tears my cheeks attaint, his cheeks are moist with moan;
 If I disclose the wounds the which my heart have slain,
 He takes his fascia off and wipes them dry anon.

If so I walk the woods, the woods are his delight;
 If I myself torment, he bathes him in my blood;
 He will my soldier be if once I want to fight;

If seas delight, he steers my bark amid the flood:
 In brief the cruel god doth never from me go,
 But makes my lasting love eternal with my woe.

Desportes himself translated freely from the Italian without

acknowledgment, and Lodge says nothing about this poem of his being a translation from Desportes. Furthermore this same sonnet gave Lodge the hint for his poem beginning:

Turn I my looks unto the skies,
Love with his arrows wounds mine eyes;
If so I gaze upon the ground,
Love then in every flower is found;
Search I the shade to fly my pain,
He meets me in the shade again.

Similarly he modelled on the opening stanzas of a poem by Desportes,

La terre naguère glacée
Est ores de vert tapissée,
Son sein est embelli de fleurs,
L'air est encore amoureux d'elle,
Le ciel rit de la voir si belle,
Et moi j'en augmente mes pleurs,

his poem in *Scylla's Metamorphosis*, beginning:

The earth late choked with showers
Is now arrayed in green;
Her bosom springs with flowers,
The air dissolves her teen:
The heavens laugh at her glory,
Yet bide I sad and sorry.

Bullen goes on to give examples of borrowings from Desportes by Nicholas Breton and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and claims with justice that Lodge and others greatly improved upon their models. To drive this point home it is only necessary to give two more illustrations. Contrast Desportes's

On verra défaillir tous les astres aux cieux

Plutôt que la fureur des rapports envieux
Efface en mon visage un trait de votre image,

with Lodge's

First shall the heavens want starry light

Before I false my faith to thee.

How Lodge carries one's thoughts on to Burns and his *O my Luv's like a red, red rose!* Still more striking yet is the contrast between Desportes's

O Nuit, jalouse Nuit, contre moi conjurée,
 Qui renflammes le ciel de nouvelle clarté,
 T'ai-je donc aujourd'hui tant de fois désirée
 Pour être si contraire à ma félicité,

and the passionate cry of an anonymous poet in *The Phoenix Nest*, beginning:

O Night, O jealous Night, repugnant to my measures!
 O Night so long desired, yet cross to my content!
 There's none but only thou that can perform my pleasures,
 And none but only thou that hindereth my intent.

So faded the wreath that for so long encircled Ronsard's brow. As we shall see in the next chapter, to quote Walter Pater's words, 'the poetry of Malherbe came with its sustained style and weighty sentiment, but with nothing that set people singing; and the lovers of such poetry saw in the poetry of the Pleiad only the latest trumpery of the Middle Age.' But the lyrical sweetness of the Renaissance, not to win popular favour again until its recovery in the nineteenth century, did persist into the thæteenth century, and we may close this chapter with two If so I plain'rst take a version of the most graceful of the idylls by uquelin de la Fresnaye, lawyer, poet, and critic, If I lament the year 1606:

If tears my (57)
 If I disclose

He takes his

If so I walk flowers, where lilies vigil kept,
 If I myself te lis like an infant slept,
 He will my i I about her visage fair
 If seas delight Loves, in childish glee,
 In brief the and danced triumphantly,
 But makes n n heaven's bright image there.

Desportes t ched my wonder grew,
 r, my heart so true;
 whispered in my ear:

'Thou fool! when such a moment's lost,
Time and again we rue the cost;
A marvel, did it reappear!'

Admonished thus I bent me low,
And, creeping silently and slow,
I kissed her lips incarnadine.
Tasting such bliss my spirit cries:
'These are the joys of Paradise
Reserved for souls we call divine.'

Then read the smooth-flowing epitaph composed for himself by a nephew of Desportes, Mathurin Regnier, most famous as a satirist, who lived on to 1613:

(58)

EPITAPH ON HIMSELF

I've lived my life in careless ease,
And come and gone as best might please,
Obeying nature's harmless call;
I wonder what the cause may be
That Death should turn her thoughts on me,
Who never thought of her at all.

CHAPTER IV

THE AUGUSTAN AGE

DURING the sixteenth century the social and political condition of France had been marvellously changed. From a poor and struggling kingdom in 1500, fighting for consolidation against rival forces within its borders, it had fair early in the seventeenth century, despite the check occasioned by the Wars of Religion, to become the wealthiest and most powerful kingdom in Europe. The revenue of Louis XII, son of Charles d'Orléans, the poet, was at the beginning of the century about two million crowns. The reckless Francis I squeezed some five millions out of his people. His son, Henry II, father-in-law of Mary Queen of Scots, and, by the irony of events, killed in a joust by the Scottish knight, Montgomery, had six and a half millions, and was forced to contract loan after loan. It is no wonder that his son again, If so I pl^{ed} with debt though his revenue had risen to nine

If I lament : drew to a pitch that was unendurable, and the
If tears my : aggravated through wholesale plundering by tax-
If I disclose : as estimated that when the Duc de Sully, the
He takes his : Henry IV, took the finances in hand at the end
of half the nominal sum arising from taxes found

If so I walk : lis treasury. Sully it was who not only initiated
If I myself te : I ab^t but carried them through. Though not
He will my si : Lov^r, encourage industry and commerce, he
and the country by fostering agriculture,

If seas delight, in a ⁿhe active line of action lay in the ruthless
In brief the cri- tched n. His work was continued, after a
But makes my : Luis XIII, by that trusty servant of
Desportes 1/ ir, my real financier France had produced.
whisper^r tampering under foot the notorious

Fouquet, peculator in chief, of whom the best that can be said is that he lavished some of his ill-gotten gains on the patronage of letters, and in befriending La Fontaine in particular. Colbert was a man of far greater insight than Sully, for he promoted industry and commerce, and not merely agriculture, and he built up for France not only a navy, but also a mercantile marine. The immense wealth with which he furnished Louis XIV was squandered by *le Roi Soleil*, the Sun King, on foreign adventures, and works of luxury such as Versailles, in the effort to fulfil with due splendour the destiny prepared for him by Richelieu in the lifetime of his father, Louis XIII.

Of the four great statesmen produced in France during the seventeenth century, Sully, Richelieu, Colbert, and Mazarin, who created for France the absolute monarchy that crashed before the end of the eighteenth century in the French Revolution, the greatest as a political figure is Cardinal Richelieu, who ruled the country during the nominal kingship of Louis XIII. No one can ever forget the towering figure of Richelieu and his haughty air, who has read Dumas's *Three Musketeers* or Vigny's darkly-drawn *Cinq Mars*, or seen the gorgeous portrait of him by Philippe de Champaigne, in full robes, surmounted by the narrow head, keen, crafty face, cold, searching eyes, and pointed beard.

It was the heyday of absolutism in France that covered the Augustan age, and the approach to it during the early part of the seventeenth century was a period of transition from the gaiety, alternating with a mild melancholy, and the graceful charm of Ronsard and his school, with its music suggesting now an air of Mozart's, now an idyllic murmur as soft as one of Debussy's, to the measured pomp and circumstance of the reign of Louis XIV. The age was that which produced four of the outstanding figures in French literature, Corneille, Racine, Molière, and La Fontaine; so eminent indeed are they that the claim made for them that theirs was the classic age of French literature is not extravagant. The age has also been called the age of the Alexandrine, so entirely does that metre dominate it. But we must not forget that the establishment of the Alexandrine as the characteristic metre in French poetry was the work of the Pleiad, and the movement initiated during the early half of the seventeenth century was towards the standardizing of it by rules almost as strict as those of Latin prosody, and the provision of a content full and

dignified enough to be carried on its long and measured beat.

We may be allowed during the lull in the production of lyric poetry which marks the age of the Alexandrine, to be greatly daring, and to say a word in favour of it. We have not been fair in this country to the Alexandrine. Matthew Arnold said of it: 'It seems to me that . . . the Alexandrine is inadequate; that as a vehicle for high poetry it is greatly inferior to the hexameter or to the iambics of Greece (for example) or to the blank verse of England. Therefore the man of genius who uses it is at a disadvantage as compared with the man of genius who has for conveying his thoughts a more adequate vehicle, metrical or not. Racine is at a disadvantage as compared with Sophocles or Shakespeare. . . .'

He begs the question. The man of supreme genius is not the slave of his instrument. Villon was not the slave of the artificial verse-forms of his age. Matthew Arnold would not have dared to suggest that Dante with his *terza rima* was at a disadvantage as compared with Milton and his blank verse. Had a Dante and a Milton arisen in France, would the Alexandrine have cribbed, cabined, and confined them? Devastating examples of ill-informed and even grotesque misrepresentations of the Alexandrine on the part of English critics of high repute are given by Émile Legouis in his *Défense de la Poésie française*, a book which ought to be in the hands of every English student of the language. Three points are to be borne in mind if an English reader desires to realize the full value of the Alexandrine as a vehicle of poetic expression.

Firstly, the Alexandrine is not merely a line of six feet, but one of four stressed accents as well—some modern prosodists would say three stressed accents at times—the stressed accents varying in position in one line as compared with another and, furthermore, between the stressed accents one syllable may be emphasized more than another. To show what variety this introduces into the Alexandrine as a Frenchman reads it aloud or in his mind, Legouis gives as an example six lines taken not from one of the great classic French poets, nor from Victor Hugo or one of the other emancipators of the nineteenth century, but from Boileau, the so-called 'Lawgiver of Parnassus' in the seventeenth century, who in his *Art poétique*, one of the most remarkable

critical poems ever written, codified as it were the principles of Malherbe. In reading the following passage note that the four stressed accents of each line have the *plus* sign over them, while any syllable between them calling for some emphasis is marked by the *long* sign :

+ + + - +
Le commandeur voulait la scène plus exacte;
+ + + - +
Le vicomte indigné sortait au second acte;
+ + + - +
L'un, défenseur zélé des bigots mis en jeu,
+ + + + +
Pour prix de ses bons mots le condamnait au feu;
+ + + + +
L'autre, fougueux marquis, lui déclarait la guerre,
+ + + + +
Voulait venger la cour immolée au parterre.

English blank verse read as if one were scanning it ruthlessly would be as intolerable as the Alexandrine so treated. Compare, e.g.:

+ + + + +
All night the dreadless angel unpursued,

with :

+ + + + +
Où sont-ils, les marins sombrés dans les nuits noires?

And yet nine out of ten Englishmen when denouncing the Alexandrine thus thump it out.

Secondly, let us not forget that the French speak faster than the English, and also, as that great dramatic critic, William Archer, spent years in trying to drive home to us, French actors have studied the art of diction, the clear enunciation of words and the phrasing of sentences as carried across the footlights, more assiduously than we have. The long speeches of Racine have wearied many an English reader, as compared with one of Shakespeare's longest efforts, precisely because he takes them at the deliberate pace at which, in accordance with the English tradition, blank verse is delivered on the stage.

But if an Englishman has heard at the Odéon in Paris a good French actor declaim one of Racine's great speeches, written in long sinewy Alexandrines, beginning deliberately, then increasing the pace as his audience warms to the spoken word, and almost chanting the more rhythmical passages, until the climax of the

speech is reached, and the final words are poured out in a veritable torrent of eloquence, he is once and for all shaken out of his insular misconception and misunderstanding. He may still prefer his English blank verse deliberately spoken to the impassioned delivery of the French Alexandrine. But he cannot say that a hundred Alexandrines spoken by a French actor take longer than a hundred lines of blank verse as rendered on the English stage. The rhythm of the Alexandrine is like the rhythm of a racing eight, a long, sweeping rhythm with every now and then a change in the rate of striking. What boating man but knows the thrill that runs through a well-trained crew, still full of rowing, when stroke sets himself, as the expression goes, give them ten?

Thirdly, we must recognize what resonance is given to French by the richness of its nasal tones. These are as difficult for Englishmen to appreciate, and to almost all Englishmen to read as to indicate the value of the mute *e*. If you doubt it ask an English friend, and after him a French friend, to pronounce the simple French words *non* and *pain*, and then that subtle place-name, *Laon*. It is almost incredible that Landor, a distinguished man of letters, and one of wide culture, should have sunk so low in abuse of the resonance of French 'ne' 'Your nasal twang, the most disagreeable and disguised sounds, being produced by the same means as we reject a o and thus reminding us of one.' Let Landor speak for himself and, to forget him, invite some Frenchman of your acquaintance to read to you the sestet of Heredia's superb sonnet on the death of the eagle that rashly dared the lightning:

Avec un cri sinistre, il tournoie, emporté
 Par la trombe, et, crispé, buvant d'un trait sublime
 La flamme éparsé, il plonge au fulgurant abîme.
 Heureux qui pour la Gloire ou pour la Liberté,
 Dans l'orgueil de la force et l'ivresse du rêve,
 Meurt ainsi, d'une mort éblouissante et brève!

Note in this passage not only the nasal sounds, but also the variety of the long and short vowel sounds. In what language can you find six lines more rhythmical and more resonant?

But let us return now to Malherbe, who constituted himself the reformer of French poetry from the Pleiad's florid luxuriance

and freedom in phraseology and metre. To a new age, when the fount of lyrical inspiration was running dry, their handling of the Muse seemed a sort of trifling with what should be regarded as a very dignified, statuesque figure. Malherbe was born at Caen and as far back in the sixteenth century as 1555. But it was not until after its close, when he was nearly fifty years of age, that he rose to prominence, and as a favourite at the court of Henry IV became the dominant poet of his time. His self-imposed mission was, to quote a summary of Mr. Saintsbury's, 'to foster a tendency "towards the restriction of vocabulary and rhythm, the avoidance of original and daring metaphor and suggestion, the perfecting of a few metres (with the Alexandrine their head) into a delicate but monotonous harmony, and the extinction of individual licence in favour of rigid rule.' His work ably seconded by Boileau, who took up his mantle in the half of the seventeenth century and, as we have already seen in his brilliant *Art poétique* codified his principles.

would herbe's own poetry, small in amount, as perhaps is only
e.g.: expected in the case of one who was as critical of himself
 thers, does not invite translation, so finished is it and so
with: led in its chill perfection. The most delightful and
 of his lines, which occur in an elegy on the death of a
Où s daughter:

Se an echo of the Ronsard whose influence he set himself to
the rov. But here is a version of the fine sonnet he wrote on
Arc death of his son, killed in a duel, which, despite what the
hav her says in his grief, is generally allowed to have been quite
an erly fought:

(59)

ON THE DEATH OF HIS SON

That my son should have cast mortality,
That son so brave, and whom I loved so sore,
I write not this against ill-fortune's score,
Since in the course of nature man must die.

But that two rogues, by sudden treachery,
Should deal the tragic death I now deplore,

Therein my grief can find no comfort more,
And all my feelings throb in harmony.

My God, my Saviour, since through law of thought,
There being no medicine for a soul distraught,
The vow of vengeance is by sanction strong,

Stand Thou beside me to avenge my loss;
Thy justice pleads, and those who did the wrong
Are sons to those who nailed Thee on the cross.

And here is a version of his short poem on the death in infancy of Mlle de Conty, which shows how high within his range was Malherbe's poetic sense, and how the union of grace, finesse, and tact makes a French compliment the most exquisite in the world:

(60)

This little child do not compare
With goddesses however fair
Who lived, we're told, in days of yore;
These are but fancies woven in space.
Say this, and you need say no more:
She has her mother's lovely face.

Malherbe did not have it all his own solemn way in the work of reform. A popular poet contemporary with him, though much younger, was Vincent Voiture, born in 1598, who enjoyed himself in exercises on the model of artificial forms of a far earlier date. Indeed, he went back for inspiration, as Théodore de Banville has insisted, past Ronsard to Clément Marot. He was a great favourite with the ladies of the *salon* held in the Hôtel Rambouillet, whose provincial cousins were satirized by Molière in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, the most sparkling of his comedies. Here are versions of the best known of his sonnets, and of his rondeaux:

(61)

SONNET TO URANIE

I 'll have to end my days in love of Uranie:
Absence nor lapse of time avails to cure my pain,
And I see nothing left that can my life sustain,
Or bring me back again, once lost, my liberty.

For many a day I 've known how strict her scruples be,
 But thinking of the charms that now my death ordain,
 I bless my martyrdom, and even to die am fain ;
 I dare not breathe a word against her tyranny.

Reason from time to time a shy approach has made,
 Telling me to revolt and promising her aid ;
 But when in sore distress I 've sought for solace there,

After I 've struggled hard, and love in vain withstood,
 She says that Uranie alone is sweet and fair,
 And ties me up more tight than all my senses could.

(62)

RONDEAU

My God, 'tis done with me: for Isabeau
 Has called on me to write her a rondeau,
 And my embarrassment thereat 's extreme.
 What! thirteen lines, eight rhyming *owe*, five *eam*!
 I 'd just as soon build her a boat to row.
 But there you have a heap of five or so,
 Let 's make them eight, enlisting friend Brodeau,
 And adding one more by some clever scheme:

My God, 'tis done!

If I could rack my brain and safely stow
 Yet five lines more, well would my cargo show.
 But now I 'm in the eleventh, it would seem,
 And here 's the twelfth, a fact I 'll swear, no dream;
 Lo and behold, thirteen in even flow!

My God, 'tis done!

And here is an amusing epitaph by François Maynard, diplomatist and lawyer, born at Toulouse in 1582. Though he was an avowed pupil of Malherbe, he did not always write in his master's vein:

(63)

EPITAPH ON A HARD DRINKER

Here lieth Paul who dropped his eyes
 When sober people came his way,
 And without ceasing prayed the skies
 For three Octobers to one May.

Stout pillar of the public-house,
 His rule was: well your herring souse,
 To flavour bottles numberless.
 Stranger, who happen here to call,
 His soul's one wish you 'll lightly guess—
 To drink your health, the wherewithal!

The Augustan Age may be said to begin with Corneille, in the first portion of the seventeenth century, during the reign of Louis XIII, and under the commanding influence of Richelieu. The passion and splendour of Corneille's earlier tragedies, which dominated the French stage for twenty years, stamp him as possibly the greatest poet of the seventeenth century. Modern taste and criticism may confer that title on his younger rival, Racine, whose perfection of form and the deeper psychological insight claimed for him seem to have won favour now for many years. These two great poets must be regarded as dramatic poets pure and simple, for they wrote little that even approximates to lyric verse, and cannot therefore be regarded as coming strictly within the scope of this book. But even if there was not in either of them, as there was in the case of Shakespeare, a rich lyrical vein to force them now and again to some outburst of lyrical song, how is it possible in any study of French poetry to leave entirely out of account two of the three or four greatest of French poets? Let us venture, then, to say something of them and their work, leaving those who wish to enjoy a fuller account of the riches to be found in them, as also of the treasury of Molière's wit, to read what Mr. Lytton Strachey says of them in the third and fourth chapters of his incomparable introduction to French literature, *Landmarks in French Literature*, published in the Home University Library, and, in English, the masterpiece of its kind.

Pierre Corneille (1606-84) was born at Rouen, and was the son of a lawyer of some standing. He was educated by the Jesuits, well grounded by them in Latin, and began life in the practice of the law. Soon, however, he turned his attention to the writing of plays. He began with comedies, and met with no small success, and it is possible to see in them the first glimmer of what was later to ripen in Molière's brain into the full glory of a Comic Muse that has dominated the world ever since.

Corneille did collaborate with Molière in *Psyché*, and it may be regretted that the latter did not take over and complete Corneille's fine figure of fun, the Falstaffian Matamore, who redeems his clumsy play within a play, *L'Illusion comique*. Later on when in the full tide of success as a tragedian he wrote a comedy, *Le Menteur*, which held the stage.

But his fame rests on six or eight masterpieces in a whole series of plays written during a long life that lasted to 1684. The play that placed him on a pinnacle of fame in 1636 was that most romantic of all classical dramas, *Le Cid*, the scene of which is laid in Spain, always to the French a country of romance, and this was followed by *Horace*, *Cinna*, *Polyeucte*, *Pompée*, and *Rodogune*, all of them great examples of his art. But in 1664, Corneille's fifty-ninth year, was produced *La Thébaïde*, the first great play of his rival, Racine, and thenceforward as the fame of Racine grew that of Corneille declined.

Jean Racine (1639-99) was born at La Ferté-Milon, near Soissons, where his father held some official position. He lost both father and mother in infancy, but his grandparents looked well after his education, which ended with three years at the celebrated school at Port-Royal, where he learned Greek as well as Latin, and a year at the Collège d'Harcourt in Paris. His success with *La Thébaïde* naturally led him to concentrate on the writing of plays, and during the next thirteen years he produced in regular succession eight plays of the finest quality, including a comedy, *Les Plaideurs*. In 1677 appeared *Phèdre*, by general consent a greater play than any of its predecessors, but its prospects of success were ruined by a court intrigue, in which no less a personage than the Duchesse de Bouillon, a niece of Mazarin, was concerned. This reverse mortified Racine so deeply that for twelve years he wrote no more plays.

But he was a born courtier, and as a favourite of Louis XIV he did not fare too ill. Certainly his later years were not tormented as were Corneille's by poverty and neglect. In 1689 and 1691, twelve and fourteen years after *Phèdre*, he produced, to please Madame de Maintenon, and very probably at her request, two biblical plays, *Esther* and *Athalie*, the latter admittedly the one rival to *Phèdre* for pre-eminence among all his plays, surely an achievement hard to parallel after so long a period of silence.

Fate has ordered it, that in life and death these two great

poets and dramatists should be regarded as rivals, and that not only in their own country, but also abroad. At one period Corneille has been acclaimed as the master, at another Racine. To trace the history of the controversy is beside our purpose. But it may be claimed that Mr. Lytton Strachey in his passionate advocacy of Racine's claims has indulged in a good deal of special pleading. Let it not be forgotten that Corneille made the great French drama of the Augustan Age—Racine, thirty years his junior, founded himself on the achievement of his predecessor. Here is a summary of what can be said, and has been said, in reviewing the comparative merits of the two poets.

The difference in mood and temperament of the two men accounts for differences in the style and quality of their work. Corneille's was a wholly masculine temperament, in Racine's there was a feminine element. In Corneille's plays a man is generally the dominant figure, in Racine's it is as often a woman. There is a rhetorical splendour about Corneille's verse which stars his plays with gorgeous lines; at times he overstrains himself until his speech offends by excess of emphasis. Fine lines, great lines, are not rare in Racine, e.g. the much quoted:

C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée,

but they are not so numerous, and generally his versification is smoother and more level, and his effects of emphasis obtained by subtler means; but he tends to monotony, and if Corneille's failing at times is bombast, Racine's is insipidity.

Racine had the advantage of studying Greek at Port-Royal, and Euripides gave the inspiration for his *Phèdre*, a greater figure perhaps than any conceived by Corneille, and one that has kinship with the sombre figure of Lady Macbeth herself. But for Shakespearian pomp and majesty in speech or scene the one play that stands out among all that either of them wrote is Corneille's *Pompée*. The pity is that its end provides no worthy conclusion, like the four superb lines that end *Le Cid*, when Don Fernand, King of Castile, resolves on a hopeful note the tangle in which the sorely tried hero, Don Rodrigue, finds himself enwound:

Espère en ton courage, espère en ma promesse;
Et, possédant déjà la cœur de ta maîtresse,
Pour vaincre un point d'honneur qui combat contre toi,
Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi.

C_c The will of a strong man dominates Corneille's interest, and reale complexities of love, and honour, and patriotism, that may fitand in the way of the smooth exercise of that will introduce the complications that make up the stuff of tragedy. The love interest dominates Racine, love not as a mere emotion, but as an absorbing passion, the power of which is bound to work havoc with the other interests of life. And yet there is something of Racine in Corneille's *Polyeucte*, and a good deal of Corneille in Racine's *Athalie*. It is claimed that Racine was the subtler psychologist of the two, and this perhaps has to be conceded, but psychology is, like rhetoric, a much-abused term, and the advantage is not as overwhelmingly on Racine's side as Mr. Strachey would have us believe. The fact is both dramatists dealt mainly in types, though they differentiated the individuals of a type fairly well; only Racine created in *Phèdre* the subtlest figure of them all. Racine adapts himself easily to the requirements of the three unities; Corneille chafes under them at times, and with him, as in the case of *Le Cid*, the conventions now and again wear thin.

Finally, just as we have claimed that the temperaments of the two poets determined the qualities of their work, so we may claim that the temperaments of their critics will determine their attitude. If your critic is of a fine intellectual cast, who likes to settle down in his arm-chair and read without emotional disturbance a smoothly written work of the highest literary distinction, let him choose Racine. But if he is one who likes to stiffen in his chair at times, and even to shout out aloud a verse that rouses him, then Corneille is his man.

An English reader finds difficulty in appraising the work of Corneille and Racine for two reasons. First he is at a loss, as we have already pointed out, to appreciate the rhythm of rhymed Alexandrine verse, on which a Frenchman can play as on a musical instrument. Secondly, he cannot help contrasting the freedom and luxuriance and variety of the Elizabethan dramatists, Shakespeare in chief, with the concentration and constraint imposed on French drama of the Augustan period by the three classic unities of time, place, and action, which required that a play should centre on one single point of interest, *none* of the action in relation to the subject taking place on the stage, that the scene right through the play should not be changed and, finally, that the whole action of the play should be concluded within a limited time.

French critics have pointed out that it was a sense of realism that confirmed a tendency to the observance of the unities. Means of lighting and staging were limited, and confinement of the action as far as possible to one adequate set scene necessarily limited both time and action as well. However this may be, there is one important fact that confronts those who still denounce the unities whole-heartedly. The art of the theatre in modern times has tended to relinquish the picturesque luxuriance of Elizabethan days, and to conform to certain limitations that approximate to those imposed by the principles underlying the three classic unities. Indeed, the modern three-act play without change of scene, not uncommon on the London stage men-to-day, is almost a complete return to the classic tradition.

To illustrate the work of these two great poets we propose Racine's give renderings in blank verse of one scene from a play of each man is them, and we make bold to think that those who know woman. their characteristics will recognize each as a fair example of which author, and such an one as could not have been conceived trains written by the other. The renderings are in the blank ver. Fine familiar to us, for even were it possible to make a translation sted: these passages in rhymed English Alexandrines, their rhythm could not hope to represent the dramatic force and vigour of the French originals. It may be pointed out that such a master of translation as M. Derocquigny of Lille has been forced in hised remarkable translations¹ into French verse of Shakespeare's great tragedies to adopt *unrhymed* Alexandrines.

Let us begin with Corneille and, before producing our chief d example of his work, indulge ourselves with a fine specimen of the rhetoric of which his plays are full. This is the outburst in Act 1. Scene 5 of *Le Cid*, when the aged veteran, Don Diègue, who has been singled out for distinction by his king, is struck in the face by a jealous and a younger rival, the Count de Gormas —an insult which at his age he is powerless to avenge:

(64)

Wrath and despair! Old age, mine enemy!
Have I then lived so long but to be shamed?
Have I grown grey in warlike exercise
To see my laurels blasted in a day?

¹ See the bi-lingual *Collection Shakespeare* published in Paris by J. M. Dent & Sons.

Mine arm, the admiration of all Spain,
 Mine arm that has so oft this empire saved,
 So oft upborne its monarch's royal throne,
 Does it now fail my need, do nought for me?
 O cruel memory of glories past!
 Work of so many days effaced in one!
 New dignity fatal to my content!
 Sheer precipice whence crashes my renown!
 Must I behold the count out-soar my fame,
 And die without revenge or live despised?

The play from which our main example is to be taken is *ace*. The legend that furnishes the plot of the play runs as we in the ^{ws.} Alba Longa is still Rome's rival for supremacy. The army is besieging Rome, and by agreement it is decided all in order to save bloodshed the issue shall be decided by ⁱⁿ combat between chosen champions of either side. The three ^{un} Horatii are selected to represent Rome, the three ⁱⁿ Curiatii Alba. But both armies are shocked when it is realized how closely bound are the two families by ties of relationship. Sabina, wife of the eldest Horatius, is a sister of Curiatii; while Camilla, sister of the Horatii, is affianced to the eldest Curiatius. The matter is therefore adjourned that the gods may be consulted. Alas! the decision of the gods is that the combat must proceed. At the first clash two of the Horatii are slain, and all three Curiatii wounded. The eldest Horatius, unwounded, feigns flight, and then turns on his wounded pursuers and kills them one after another. Horatius returning in triumph meets his sister, and calls on her to congratulate him. Instead, she reviles him; whereat in wrath and indignation he slays her. After trial he is, not without much heart-searching on the king's part, acquitted of her murder.

Worth hearing is Sabine's speech, in behalf of Camille and herself, when told by her father-in-law of the gods' decision that the combat must proceed; it affords an illustration of the fine irony of which Corneille is a master:

(65)

I may admit your news is strange to me:
 For in the godhead I had thought to find
 Much less injustice and far more good will.

CHANTICLEER

Console us not; 'gainst such a weight of ill
 Pity but speaks in vain, and reason palls.
 We have it in our power to end our griefs;
 Who can face death, fears no calamity.
 Easy were it for us while you are here
 To make a specious calm of our despair.
 But when one can be weak without disgrace,
 To make an outward show is cowardly;
 The practice of such arts we leave to men,
 And only seek to pass for what we are.
 We ask not that a courage great as yours
 Should stoop, like us, to murmur against fate.
 Meet without flinching mortal shocks like these.
 Watch our tears flow, nor mix with them your own;
 And for a crowning grace, in such a coil
 Be constant still in mind, but let us weep.

The speeches of both Sabine and Camille, as indeed of Curiace and Curiace, are worth study, for they show the psychological insight displayed by Corneille in the differentiation of character from another.

But the way is now clear for us to approach the greater *Horace*, iv. 5:

(66)

HORACE

Sister, behold the avenger of our brothers,
 The arm that stemmed the course of adverse fate,
 That makes us Alba's master; even the arm
 That rules alone two nations' destinies;
 Behold these trophies, witness to my fame,
 And pay thy due to my triumphant hour.

CAMILLE

Take then my tears; they are the debt I owe.

HORACE

Rome wants not tears after exploits like these,
 And our twain brothers' deaths, mischance of war,
 Are too well paid in blood to call for tears:
 Nothing is lost, when the loss is avenged.

CAMILLE

Since they are satisfied with blood outpoured
 I 'll wear no more for them my mourning weeds,
 And I 'll forget their deaths thou hast avenged.
 But who 'll avenge for me my lover's death,
 To make me suddenly forget his loss?

HORACE

What sayst thou, wretch?

CAMILLE

O Curiace, my love!

HORACE

Unworthy sister, past all bearing bold !
 Of one whom I 've laid low, Rome's enemy,
 Thy lips protest the name, thy heart the love !
 Thy guilty ardour panteth for revenge !
 This is thy cry, thy very heart-beat this !
 Yield less to impulse, tighter curb thy will,
 And make me blush no more to hear thy sighs ;
 Stifle thy flaming passions from henceforth ;
 Banish them from thy mind ; brood o'er my triumphs.
 Let these henceforward be thy sole concern.

CAMILLE

Give me then, savage one, a heart like thine ;
 And if thou wishest me to speak my mind,
 Give back my Curiace, or let me love ;
 My joy, my grief were bound up with his fate ;
 I loved him living, and I mourn him dead.
 Seek not to find thy sister as she was ;
 Thou seest but an injured lover now,
 Who, like a fury clinging to thy heels,
 Will never cease to blame thee for his death.
 Tiger, athirst for blood, who bann 'st my tears,
 Who bidst me in his death find something fine,
 And, to the sky extolling thy exploits,

Wouldst have me kill him yet a second time!
 May such misfortunes dog thee through thy life,
 That thou mayst sink until thou envy me!
 Mayst thou ere long by some base deed besoul
 The fame so dear to thy brutality!

HORACE

Heavens! who has ever seen frenzy like this!
 Dost thou believe that outrage leaves me cold,
 And that I'll bear this dark stain on my race?
 Command, command a death that's well for us,
 And to the memory of a man prefer
 The debt thy birth entails, the good of Rome.

CAMILLE

Rome, the one hate of my indignant soul,
 Rome, to whom thou hast sacrificed my lover,
 Rome, whom thy heart adores, where thou wast born,
 Rome, whom I loathe because she honours thee!
 May all her neighbours, sworn confederates,
 Sap her foundations still not firmly laid!
 And if all Italy is not enough,
 To combat her may East combine with West,
 From the world's ends nations a hundred come,
 And cross, for her destruction, mountains and seas!
 On her may she herself pull down her walls,
 Tear out her entrails with her proper hands,
 And may the wrath of Heaven, lit by my prayers,
 Rain down on her a cataract of fire!
 To see with mine own eyes the lightning fall,
 Houses in ashes, thy laurel-wreaths in dust,
 See the last Roman at his latest gasp,
 I the sole cause, and then to die for joy!

HORACE [*sword in hand pursuing his sister, who flies off stage*]

Too much, my patience must to reason yield;
 Go down to Hell and mourn thy lover there!

CAMILLE [*wounded behind the scene*]

Ah, traitor!

HORACE [*reappearing*]

So may sudden doom await
All who dare mourn an enemy of Rome!

Now let us turn to Racine. The play of his from which we take bold to present the translation of a scene is *Phèdre*, generally regarded as his masterpiece. Phaedra, or Phèdre, as we shall always designate that famous figure, whose mother was Pasiphae, daughter of Helios, the Sun, and whose father was Minos, son of Zeus, is married to Theseus, King of Athens. She receives a passion for her stepson, Hippolytus, who himself in turn loves Aricia, daughter of a rival to the throne of Athens, whom Theseus had slain. Hippolytus repulses her, and reveals his love for Aricia. Frantic with jealousy Phèdre, through her confidante, Oenone, accuses Hippolytus to his father in an incestuous love for her. While the unhappy king is torn by doubt and horror, news is brought to him that his son, in flight, has been hurled from his chariot by his maddened steeds and killed. Oenone drowns herself, and sudden and terrible remorse comes over Phèdre, and in the last act she poisons herself, and makes full confession of her guilt to Theseus.

It is to be noted that while in Euripides's treatment of the legend the centre of interest is Hippolytus, Racine transfers it to the woman, Phèdre.

In Act iv there occurs the most wonderful of all Phèdre's speeches, in which she expresses her despair over the horror of the position in which she finds herself involved:

(67)

What is my purpose? Whither stray my wits?
Consumed with jealousy, Theseus I call
To help me, him, my husband who still lives,
While I love—whom? Whose heart commands my will?
Each word I speak makes my hair stand on end.
Swollen beyond all measure are my crimes;
Deceit and incest taint the air I breathe;
My homicidal hands itch for revenge,
Steeped though they be in blood of innocence.

Can wretch like me still live, and gaze upon
 This blessed sun who is my ancestor?
 The sire of gods, their lord, is my forbear;
 All heaven and earth are full of my forbears.
 Where hide me? Shall I seek eternal night?
 Ah, no! my sire there clasps the fatal urn,
 That fate, men say, has placed in his strict hands,
 Minos, the judge in hell of ghostly men.
 How his dark form will tremble there, aghast,
 When he beholds his daughter face to face
 Forced to avow so many divers sins,
 And crimes perhaps unknown as yet in hell!
 Father, what wilt thou say at this dread sight?
 Methinks I see the urn fall from thy hands;
 Methinks I see thee search out some new way
 With thine own hands to execute thy child.
 Pardon! Some cruel god has doomed thy race;
 See in thy daughter's madness his revenge.
 Alas! my sad heart never reaped the fruit
 Of those dread crimes whose shame pursues me still.
 Dogged by misfortune to my latest breath,
 In torment I yield up my wretched life.

Now we may proceed to the last scene of the great tragedy:

(68)

THESEUS

Ah, well! the triumph 's yours; my son is dead.
 What ground have I for fear! What cruel doubt,
 Though heart forgives him, rightly startles me!
 But, madam, he is dead; cling to your prey;
 Joy in his death, whether deserved or no.
 I 'm ready that mine eyes be aye abused;
 I hold him guilty, since you bring the charge.
 His death affords me food enough for tears,
 Without my seeking odious evidence,
 That cannot bring him back to my just grief,
 And might perchance but add to my distress.
 Let me escape, far from these shores and you,
 The bleeding image of my mangled son.

Haunted, confused by tragic memories
 I'd banish me from the whole universe.
 All seems to rise against my injustice.
 My very fame augments my suffering:
 Less known of men, the easier might I hide.
 I hate the high gods' gracious care of me;
 I'll plead with them for some death-dealing gift,
 And plague them now no more with useless prayers.
 Whate'er their tragic kindness does for me
 Cannot repay what they have robbed me of.

PHÈDRE

No, Theseus! an ill silence must I break,
 And give back to your son his innocence:
 He was not guilty.

THESEUS

Hapless father, I!
 It was upon your word that I condemned him.
 Ah, cruel one, think you excuse enough——

PHÈDRE

My moments now are precious; hear me, Theseus:
 'Twas I who on thy son, modest and chaste,
 Dared cast an eye profane, incestuous.
 Heaven kindled in my breast a fatal flame:
 Detestable Oenone did the rest.
 Fearing Hippolytus, my madness known,
 Might noise abroad the passion that he loathed,
 The traitress, using my extremity,
 Hastened to meet you, and with her own lips
 Charged him. Her forfeit's paid. Fearing my wrath,
 She found beneath the waves a doom too kind.
 Already had a dagger slit my life,
 Were injured innocence not left to mourn:
 By thus confessing my remorse, I've sought
 A gentler path to lead me down to death.
 What I have drunk runs through my burning veins
 A poison that Medea brought to Athens.

Already has the venom reached my heart,
 And on that dying heart strikes strangely cold.
 E'en now I see but through a mist the sky,
 And him, my husband, whom my presence wound.
 And death has robbed the brightness of mine eyes,
 To render pure the daylight they have stained.

PANOPE [*a lady-in-waiting*]

She's dying, sire!

THESEUS

Would that the memory
 Of such a deed, so black, might die with her!
 Mine error too well known, let us shed tears
 To mingle with the blood of my poor son!
 Let us embrace what's left of that dear son,
 To expiate a curse that I abhor.
 Pay him the honours he has earned too well.
 And, better to appease his angry ghost,
 Despite the plottings of a hostile house
 His lover now shall hold a daughter's place.

Among Corneille's few shorter poems there is one that cannot be omitted, for it constitutes one of the chief ornaments of this book. The name of writers of good sonnets, of fine sonnets, is legion, but Corneille joined the select company of those who have written great sonnets when he composed his epitaph on Élisabeth Ranquet, of which a version follows:

(69)

EPIGRAPH ON ÉLISABETH RANQUET

O stranger, shed no tears upon this tomb near by;
 This woman's funeral bed is one of precious worth.
 Her body was all-pure, here her pure ashes lie,
 But her heart's zeal loves on, here where she rests in earth.

Ere yet the debt was paid owed by all nature's kind,
 Her soul, mounting beyond the compass of her eyes,
 In her Creator's hands His creature had resigned;
 And while she walked on earth her life was in the skies.

The poor, more than herself, held count of all her wealth;
 Patience in suffering served her for joy in health.
 It was for love she sought with her last breath to pray.

Stranger, thus fired by her, strive to attain her bliss,
 And, far from pitying her now she has lost our day,
 Believe one never dies who dies a death like this.

And we may well work into our scheme a version of one of Racine's hymns, still sung in Protestant churches in France, which illustrates the religious side he displayed, if not in early manhood, in his later years:

(70)

HYMN

My God, what wars my bosom fill!
 I find two different men in me:
 One would that, out of love for Thee,
 My heart to Thee were faithful still;
 The other, rebel to Thy will,
 Would make me scorn Thy law's decree.

The one, a soul of heavenly birth,
 Would have me choose my mansion there,
 To things eternal give a care,
 And count all else as nothing worth.
 The other bends my head to earth
 By weight of gloom I cannot bear.

Alas, within I strive and strain!
 Where can I hope to find my rest?
 I would—but idle is the quest;
 I would—but, O the bitter pain,
 The good I love I seek in vain,
 And do the evil I detest.

O Grace, O Light that shines to save,
 The strife within me pacify!
 And win him over tenderly,
 This man that dares Thy will to brave,
 And make of him Thy willing slave,
 Who, else, a slave to Death must die.

Nothing suitable for our purpose is to be found in Molière, born in 1622, the undisputed prince of comedy, whose name is probably better known, more welcome to the world at large than that of any other French writer. To illustrate the shorter poems of the Augustan Age we have to fall back on the fourth of the outstanding poets of the period, La Fontaine, in whom we find perfection of form as in Racine, and wit, humour, and worldly wisdom as in Molière. Moreover, he reached with his more popular appeal a wider circle than either Corneille and Racine, whose dramas were the glory of a splendid court and an aristocratic society, or even than Molière, whose delightful *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was written for the amusement of the court, and first performed in one of the halls of Chambord, still standing to-day, and though now no more than a shell, the most magnificent of all the gorgeous châteaux of Touraine.

La Fontaine, though one of the darlings of high society, was no more than his great contemporaries of gentle birth. He was born at Château-Thierry in Champagne in 1621, and lived on to the year 1695. His father was ranger of the neighbouring forests, and to that post he succeeded. But his literary bent and his vague and desultory disposition made him little suited for the practical business of life, and even, it would seem, for household affairs; since eventually he sold his office, effected what was apparently a friendly separation from his wife, and made his way to Paris. There he was admitted to the literary household of Fouquet, Louis XIV's magnificent but unscrupulous Superintendent of Finance, and when he, like Wolsey, fell, La Fontaine found a constant succession of influential patrons until the end of his life. His high standing in the literary world of his time may be gauged by the fact that he became one of a little coterie with Boileau, Molière, and Racine, who met once a week for dinner at a tavern in the rue Vieux-Colombier, a site whose literary associations were illuminated in this twentieth century by Copeau's theatre of the name, which rivalled for some years the *Comédie française* itself.

Of La Fontaine's works the outstanding one, on which rests his fame, is the *Fables*. His *Fables* have survived even the rude test of their use as a school-book by those too young to appreciate their merits, and the final word on their author was said by that distinguished Frenchman, poet, critic, scholar, and greatest

all literary *causeurs*, Sainte-Beuve. ‘To speak of La Fontaine,’ he says, ‘is never tedious, even when one is quite certain that one has nothing new to add. It is to speak of experience itself, of the moral lessons taught by life, of good common sense, subtle and profound, general and particular, lit up by wit and humour, animated with charm and imagination, corrected too and embellished by man’s higher sentiments, and, above all, fraught with the consolations of a friend. In short, it is to speak of all those things that one never realizes better than when we have grown ripe ourselves. This La Fontaine, who is given to children to read, is never relished so well as after one’s fortieth year; his is that old wine of which Voltaire speaks, and to which he has compared the poetry of Horace; he improves with age, and just as each of us appreciates La Fontaine better as we grow older, even so French literature, as it goes on and prolongs its life, seems to accord him a higher place and to recognize in him a greater figure.’

Critics have vied in extolling La Fontaine’s work, not only for perfection of form, but also for richness of content. The stories enshrined in his fables are models of short narrative, only to be surpassed perhaps in this line by the parables to be found in the Gospels, and the moral of each fable is often such a marvel of compression as to constitute an epigram in itself. The moral is always a sound one; there is no toying with paradox, no touch of mere malice, no suggestion of political or sentimental propaganda. Then come the flexibility of his phrasing, and his aptitude for hitting on just the right word wanted, either noun or adjective or verb. His vocabulary is enriched, like the Pleiad’s, with words drawn from the technical terms of the arts and crafts, or from the rustic speech of the countryside. Thus his descriptions of living creatures, of natural scenes, of the beauty of parkland, woodland, and running streams have a certainty that impress them on his readers with a sudden sense of familiarity. And then there are the rich stores of his wide knowledge of human nature to vivify and humanize the whole.

Sainte-Beuve has likened the charms of La Fontaine to those of old wine; playing on this idea, we can apply to him the fine phrase of one of our own great critics, Hazlitt, who said of William Godwin: ‘You perceive by your host’s talk as by the taste of seasoned wine that he has a *cellarage* in his understanding.’

In the following versions of poems by La Fontaine a sedulous

effort has been made to preserve the actual form of the original. In the preface stress has been laid on the importance in the translation of a poem of preserving its *pattern*. In no case is this more important than with La Fontaine, where the changes in length of line give his poems the distinctive charm of a curving grace as form winds in and out to suit the content of the fable. And this bestows on his rhythm a fine athletic quality, for the smooth transition from long line to short gives one at times the same sort of thrill as is to be had from watching the sudden, easy swerve of a fast three-quarter-back in full career.

Here, then, are versions of four of La Fontaine's *Fables*:

(71)

THE HAUGHTY MULE

A bishop's mule laid claim to old nobility,
 And talked all day and everywhere
 Of nothing but his dam, the mare,
 Of whose exploits he boasted high:
 How here or there she 'd been; how this or that she 'd done.
 He thought that as he was her son
 His fame a chronicler should find.
 Ne'er had he deigned to serve a humble doctor's will.
 But, growing old, he found his destiny—a mill!
 And then at last his sire, the ass, came back to mind.

If of misfortune this be said,
 It puts some sense in a fool's head,
 Surely the proposition 's true:
 Misfortune has its uses too.

(72)

THE WOLF AND THE DOG

A wolf there was, a thing of skin and bone,
 So well the dogs their part had played.
 The wolf met with a hound, stalwart and handsome grown,
 And sleek and fat, who there by some mischance had strayed.
 To spring, and tear him limb from limb,
 Had been Sir Wolf's first sudden whim;
 But he must fight for such a prize,
 And our mastiff was of a size

In self-defence to make some show.

The wolf, then, neared him, bowing low;

And soon the compliments began to flow,

How he admired one quite so stout!

'Good sir, it's surely your look-out

If you are not as fat as me,' the dog replied.

'Best quit the forest where you hide:

What miseries your kind appal!

Poor, stupid, starveling devils all,

Whose sad condition is to pine for food and die.

Just think, nothing assured! no mouthful at your will!

Your only food, what you can kill!

Come, follow me and find a better destiny.'

The wolf replied: 'What tasks will come my way?'

'But few,' exclaimed the dog: 'beggars and rogues to chase,

Who flaunt a stick before your face;

To make the household smile, your master's will obey:

If this you do, you'll have for pay

Great heaps of dainty scraps of every mortal kind;

Chickens' and pigeons' bones you'll find,

Not mentioning pat and caress.'

The wolf already dreamt of such celestial fare

As made him weep for tenderness.

While they walked on he saw the dog's neck rubbed and bare.

'What's this?' he asked. 'Nothing.' 'What, nothing!'

'So to me!'

'But yet, what is it?' 'Well, the collar that I wear,

By which I'm chained, may be the cause of what you see.'

'Chained!' said the wolf, 'why, then, you can't be free to run

At your sweet will!' 'Not always: but why fret?'

'Such cause have I to fret, that of your meals not one

I'll share, whatever feasts you get;

To buy a treasure at your price suits not my will.'

So said, good Master Wolf ran off; he's running still.

(73)

THE FOOL AND THE WISE MAN

A certain fool pursued with showers of stones a sage;

The wise man, turning round, hailed him: 'Friend, take
your due,

Bravely you 've done your bit, here's half a crown for you;
 You 've tired yourself enough to earn a larger wage.
 The labourer, 'tis said, is worthy of his hire;
 Look at that passer-by, he 's rich, if you inquire;
 Pass on your gifts to him, and earn your proper pay.'
 Lured by the hope of gain the fool ran off to play

His pranks upon the wealthy one.

But not in silver now was paid the price of fun;
 Bailiffs came running up; one caught him such a thwack
 He stunned him and half broke his back.

At courts of kings such fools their arts disclose;
 At your expense they make their masters roar.
 To stop their chattering tongues do you propose
 To knock them down? Of strength you may need more
 Than you possess. Best tempt them to assail
 Another who can safely wield the flail.

(74)

THE COBBLER AND THE FINANCIER

There was a cobbler sang from morning until night:

He was a marvel to the sight,

A marvel to the ear; he trilled and trilled again,

More happy than the seven wise men.

Not such his neighbour's lot; though laced with gold his
 dress,

He sang but little, slept still less:

A broker he, with funds to spare.

If at the break of day sleep sometimes got the best,

The cobbler with his songs was sure to break his rest;

Bitter the plaint he then addrest,

That Providence for all its care

Had not arranged the sale on any market-stall

Of sleep, as well as food and drink.

Therefore he bade the singer call

At his fine house, and said: 'Come, friend, just let me
 think—'

What do you earn a year?' 'A year, sir, 'pon my word!'
 Said, smiling at the thought absurd,

Our cobbler blithe and gay, ‘in no such way do I
 Make up accounts; I ’ve scarce a penny to put by
 From day to day: and when the year is dead
 If both ends meet I ’m satisfied;
 Each day provides my daily bread.’

‘Tut, tut! What do you earn a day?’ the broker cried.
 ‘Sometimes more, sometimes less: the worst is that always
 (And but for that we ’d think our earnings good enough)—
 The worst is, every year brings many holidays,

When one can’t work; these fêtes eat up our stuff;
 A feast day spoils the next; and parson up his sleeve
 Has always some new saint to make the church bell ring.’
 The broker smiled to find a man quite so naive
 And said: ‘To-day I mean to make of you a king.
 Here are a hundred pounds, keep them; if you take heed
 You ’ll find their use in time of need.’

The cobbler thought that all the gold before him glowed
 Man in a hundred years could find
 To meet the wants of humankind.

He hurried home, and there, safe in the cellar, stowed
 The gold, his joy too, side by side.

He sang no more: his tongue was tied
 The moment that he won the source of all our woes.

Sleep never entered at his door:
 Care was his constant visitor,
 Suspicions vain, fantastic foes.

Throughout the day he kept a watchful eye; at night
 A noisy cat gave him a fright;

The cat was after gold! At last, and fit to weep,
 He ran to him whom now he could awake no more:
 ‘Give back to me my songs,’ he cried, ‘give back my sleep;
 Your hundred pounds let me restore.’

As a final example of La Fontaine we venture to offer the version of a charming poem not cast in the form of a fable, his *Invocation to Delight*. Here it must be confessed that the pattern of the original has so far been departed from as to substitute for the Alexandrines, where they occur, lines of five feet into which the subject-matter seemed easily and naturally to run:

last my time,' to which La Pompadour is supposed to have rejoined: 'And after us the Deluge.'

It is not then to be wondered at that during his disastrous reign the French colonies in both Canada and India passed into the hands of England, and that the result of the Seven Years' War (1756-63), when France in alliance with Austria was hopelessly defeated by the combination of Frederick the Great and England, was that the hegemony in Europe was transferred from France to England.

Such a period was certainly not one favourable to any outburst of lyrical song after the long and splendid reign of the Alexandrine in the Augustan Age. A Juvenal might have found free scope, had a Juvenal appeared. But the eighteenth century was one of feverish intellectual effort, and produced a galaxy of great writers in prose, whose object was not merely to interest and amuse, but also to make people think, and to instruct them.

Prominent among these was that dignified relic of the seventeenth century, Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, who lived on until 1715. He was tutor to Louis XIV's very promising, but short-lived, grandson, the Duke of Burgundy, and impressed on his pupil the doctrine that a prince exists for his subjects, not his subjects for their prince. Fénelon was one of the first to voice the feeling now growing rife in all classes against the doctrine of absolutism. There was Montesquieu, who made laws and constitutions the subject not of mild acceptance or of violent prejudice, but of critical examination and of political judgment. There was Diderot, most versatile and fertile of thinkers, who rallied round him a great company of publicists, scholars, and philosophers to produce his monumental encyclopaedia, a compendium of knowledge well calculated to feed the intellectual curiosity of the age. And there was Voltaire, one of the most dazzling figures in all French literature.

Of the brilliance and the range of Voltaire's writings in prose, tales, including of course *Candide*, by general consent the masterpiece of ironic narrative, histories, criticism, and philosophy, with countless political and other pamphlets, and letters innumerable, it is outside the scope of this book to speak. Of two complete editions of his works one contains forty-eight and the other fifty-two volumes, and the reader if he wishes to form some idea

of their quality may be referred, as in the case of the great figures of the Augustan Age, to what Mr. Lytton Strachey says of their author in his *Landmarks in French Literature*. His energy was tireless throughout a life which lasted from 1694 to 1778, and it may fairly be said that intellectually he dominated the reign of Louis XV. His incisive attacks on all authority, on men, and on institutions, and on things of his day, his irritability and vanity, even his readiness to rouse himself in the defence of the persecuted, all made him enemies enough. He was twice imprisoned in the Bastille, and much of his life had to be spent on the frontier, whence escape abroad was easy, and even for a time across the frontier, in Switzerland itself.

Interludes in his life were an early visit of three years to England, which did much to enlarge his knowledge of the world, and a much later visit, again of nearly three years, to the Court of Frederick the Great at Potsdam. Frederick had long endeavoured to secure the residence at his court of the most distinguished of living Frenchmen, whose name throughout the civilized world was in every mouth; but when he did succeed in getting him he found him far too prickly an object to make a domestic pet of. They quarrelled, and the circumstances of their final parting entailed a scandal which has not yet died down.

Vast as was the volume of his work in prose, Voltaire wrote much poetry as well, and was regarded as easily the greatest poet of his time. Despite the command he had over the mechanism of verse his reputation as a great poet has not survived. His plays, some of which were most successful in his lifetime, are not now accepted as rivalling the drama of the Augustan Age. But he could write verse of exquisite grace, and use it too as a vehicle for the expression of his supreme gift of bitter irony and savage wit, in which he has never been surpassed. These qualities are notably to be found in his epigrams, and versions of a few of them will suffice to establish the claim that in this art, practised by so many distinguished poets, he stands without a rival:

Here is an inscription for a garden statue of Love, possibly in the garden of his friend, Madame du Châtelet, in whose frontier château at Cirey he lived for so long; and this is followed by a motto composed for the lady herself:

CHANTICLEER

(79)

ON A GARDEN STATUE OF LOVE

Whoe'er thou be, thy master see;
He is, he was, or has to be.

(80)

MOTTO FOR MADAME DU CHÂTELET

Rest, a few trifles, reverie,
A book or two, no bore or dun,
A friend to keep one company;
Such is my lot, a happy one.

Next, here are two of his bitterest epigrams, and they are probably not to be equalled for keen, incisive, cruel wit in all literature. The first is an example of the attacks he indulged in against the Church and its ministers. The second indicates his intolerant contempt for authors he fell foul of; Le Jay, a publisher, had produced a title-page with his portrait between those of two of his pet aversions, Fréron, a leading critic and an estimable man, and La Beaumelle, an old teacher of Voltaire:

(81)

ON A FIGURE OF CHRIST IN THE JESUIT HABIT

Consider, pray, the artfulness
Industrious monks like these can show.
My God, they 've clothed Thee in their dress,
Lest men should love Thee here below!

(82)

ON THE PLACING OF HIS PORTRAIT BETWEEN TWO OTHERS

'Twixt Fréron and La Beaumelle me!
What can Le Jay by this have meant?
It were indeed a Calvary,
Had either thief been penitent.

Here is yet another epigram on Fréron, based on an ancien model, most pleasantly developed by Goldsmith in his *Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*:

(83)

THE SNAKE THAT BIT FRÉRON

One day, down in the vale below,
 A snake bit Fréron on the toe.
 And what ensued, I ask you? Why,
 It was the snake that had to die.

Then read this gibe at J.-J. Lefranc, Marquis de Pompignan, whom he had once flattered, but whose metrical renderings of passages from Holy Writ excited his derision:

(84)

ON LEFRANC'S TRANSLATIONS FROM JEREMIAH

Can you suggest why Jeremy
 Wept all his life so copiously?
 Prophet, he saw a prospect grim:
 Lefranc one day would murder him.

Finally here is an epigram of high moral import:

(85)

AN EPITAPH

He who lies here one law did own:
 To live but for himself alone.
 No heed to his example give,
 Or men may scrawl on thy headstone:
 Here lies one with no right to live.

It is a curious but not perhaps a very profitable undertaking to speculate on what an author might have achieved had he written in another age, under social and political conditions more congenial, less irritating, less apt to turn a man from poetry to prose, to drive him into pamphleteering, however brilliant and incisive. But of this we may be sure, that had one of Voltaire's prodigious energy and intellectual power been contemporary with Corneille, Racine, and Molière, either the serious drama of the Augustan Age would have been the work of a triumvirate, or an Aristophanes would have taken his stand by Molière. How

CHANTICLEER

Since a poet there was in Voltaire may in some degree be realized from the following version of a poem he addressed to Madame Lullin when he was over eighty years old:

(86)

TO MADAME LULLIN

Ah, then you feel astonishment
 That though with eighty winters wear
 My aged muse, her vigour spent,
 Should hum a simple song once more.

Sometimes a few small shoots of green
 Gleam through the frosts that bind the clay:
 Nature rejoices at the scene,
 But early nipt it dies away.

We still can hear the note of bird,
 When skies no more are blue above;
 But tender tones no more are heard;
 He sings no longer of his love.

And so I pluck again the strings,
 Though rebel to my hand the lyre;
 Still try my voice, though while it sings
 Its trembling accents must expire.

'I would that when I say good-bye,'
 Such was Tibullus' fond demand,
 'I fixed thee, Julia, eye to eye,
 And touched thee with my dying hand.'

But when we're sure that now's the end,
 And soul with life must fly away,
 Have we the eyes to see our friend
 Or hands the last caress to pay?

At that dread moment we forget
 All that we did in sanity;
 What mortal man with joy has met
 Eyes called to watch his agony?

Delia in turn that fate must share,
 And pass into eternal night,
 Forgetting that she once was fair,
 And that she lived for love's delight.

We're born, we live, my shepherdess,
 We die, but wherefore is not clear.
 All of us sprang from nothingness:
 But whither bound? . . . God knows, my dear.

On his serious side read the following version of a fine passage from his poem on the earthquake at Lisbon in 1755, which cost the lives of over 30,000 people, and the horror of which sent a shock throughout the whole civilized world. Here we have a good example of that *saeva indignatio* in the expression of which Voltaire is one of the greatest masters. He combats here the cold-blooded indifference of some, the foolish optimism of others who claim that somehow all is well despite a disaster in one corner of the world, the cant of those who look upon such a disaster as a judgment for sin, and in uncompromising terms raises the whole problem of evil:

(87)

ON THE EARTHQUAKE AT LISBON

O miserable men! O sorrow-laden world!
 O concourse full of dread, where meets all humankind,
 Where we discuss our griefs always without avail!
 Philosophers befooled who tell us: 'All is well,'
 Hither, and contemplate with awe these ruined walls,
 These rubbish heaps, these rags, these ashes of the doomed,
 Women and children, one upon another piled,
 These human limbs dispersed neath shattered monuments;
 Thousands of hapless ones whom yawning earth devours,
 Who, bleeding, gashed, and torn, and palpitating still,
 Buried beneath their roofs, end without hope of aid
 In torment and despair their lamentable days!
 Hearing the cries half-formed that dying voices hiss,
 Before this ghastly sight, burnt bodies smoking yet,
 Dare you say: "Tis the effect of sempiternal laws,
 That God, who's free to choose and good, must set in force?"

CHANTICLEER

Dare you say, when you see these victims heaped on high:
 'God is avenged; their death is the price of their sins'?
 Was Lisbon, now no more, a fouler haunt of vice
 Than London, Paris are, both steeped in luxury?
 Lisbon is swallowed up; at Paris people dance.
 O tranquil lookers-on, whose hearts are undismayed,
 Who contemplate unmoved your shipwrecked brothers drown,
 You can discuss in peace the causes of a storm!
 But when you feel the blows of hostile destiny,
 Grown human then at last, you'll weep as we do now.
 Trust me, now that the earth opens its gulfs profound,
 My plea is innocent, my protests justified.
 Surrounded on all sides by cruelty of fate,
 Fury of wicked men, the gins and snares of death,
 Buffeted by the shocks of all the elements,
 Companions in distress, dismiss not my complaint. . . .

Thus the whole universe in all its members groans;
 For torment all are born, and one by one they die;
 And you would have us build, where tragic chaos reigns,
 Of each man's separate griefs a general happiness.
 What happiness, O man, weak, mortal, in despair?
 You tell us: 'All is well,' in a voice full of tears;
 The world gives you the lie, and even your proper hearts
 Prove false a hundred times the errors of your brain.
 The elements, brute beasts, and men are all at war.
 We must admit the fact; *evil* is in the world:
 Its secret principle is quite unknown to us.
 Has evil come from Him, the author of all good? . . .

But how conceive a God, goodness in very self,
 Prodigal of His gifts to children that He loves,
 Who yet has poured on them evils with lavish hands?
 What eye can penetrate the depth of His designs?
 Evil cannot be born of the all-perfect One;
 Cannot come from elsewhere, since God sole master is.
 And yet it does exist. O lamentable truth!
 O blend astonishing of contrarieties!

Voltaire was the tragedian of the eighteenth century, but a claim of that century which demands recognition is the part it played in the development of comedy, often in spite of the jealousy and active hostility of the *Théâtre française*. The most distinguished of the writers of comedies and vaudevilles were Lesage, best known as the author of *Gil Blas*, and Beaumarchais, author of the *Barbier de Séville* and the *Mariage de Figaro*; but among them were also Marivaux and Piron, one of the liveliest of them all as a writer of light verse. Piron's name will live for ever, if only for one of the most brilliant epigrams written in this age of epigrams, his ironic epitaph for himself:

Ci-gît Piron, qui ne fut rien,
Pas même Académicien.

Here Piron lies; worth nothing he,
Not even to grace the Academy.

A popular poet in the latter part of the eighteenth century was a great-nephew of Voltaire, Florian (1755–94) by name, whose fame is still kept alive by the success of his *Fables*, graceful imitations of those of the supreme master in this art, La Fontaine. Of the high quality of his work the following version of one of his fables, *The Phoenix*, may give some idea :

(88)

THE PHOENIX

The Phoenix, flown from Araby,
Came to our woods one summer's day:
What chirping mid the birds! In one great flock they fly
To their fine guest, due court to pay.
They watch him; on his charms refine:
His plumage and his voice, his gift of melody,
All, all is beauty, grace divine,
All gives delight to ear and eye.
For the first time on earth one sees envy depart
Before the call to praise and love one's conqueror.
The nightingale declared: 'Of sweetness such a store
Has never thrilled my ravished heart.'

CHANTICLEER

'Never,' the peacock said, 'colours more rich in hue
 Have had the glow that pleases me:
 They fill my dazzled eyes and will not let them be.'
 The other birds said much in praise, but nothing new.

His privilege they voted good:
 How he alone, bird-king, offspring of heaven on high,
 When old's laid on a pyre of scented cedar-wood
 And, self-consumed, reborn to immortality.

While all this talk went on, only the turtle-dove,
 Without a word, breathed forth a sigh.

Her mate just touched her wing in love,
 And, pressing closer, asked her why
 Such gloomy thoughts possessed her mind:
 'Like him, that happy bird, to live, is this your whim?'
 'Ah no, friend! How I pity him,
 The solitary of his kind!'

Florian is in the tradition of the seventeenth century, and it is perhaps in the early poetry of Évariste de Parny, born on the island of Bourbon in 1753, and thus a Creole like more than one of the leading French poets of the nineteenth century, that we get the earliest premonition of the sort of poetry France was yet to produce. The ease, simplicity, and sweetness of his early, and mostly erotic, verse are very remarkable, but his later poems, dull from their very length, contain among other extravagances obscene attacks on Christianity, and ill-natured, ill-founded diatribes against our own country. Among his early poems is to be found one that will give him immortality, for no French anthology will ever be complete without it. This is his *Elegy on the Death of a Young Girl*, which might have been written by that charming but unhappy poet, Gérard de Nerval, in the nineteenth century. Here is a version of it:

(89)

AN ELEGY

Her age was just past infancy,
 Like innocence her gaiety,
 And lent by Love himself her charm.
 A few more months, a few more days,
 In her pure heart that knew no harm

Had dawned child-love's first rosy rays.
 But Heaven, prescribing soon her doom,
 Vowed her young beauties to the tomb.
 She gave her breath back to the skies,
 And quietly she closed her eyes,
 Complaining not of Heaven's decrees.
 Even so a smile may fade in air,
 So die, nor leave an echo there,
 A bird's note, mid the woodland trees.

Florian and Parny may both be called charming, fluent, and easy poets, but of another cast were three other eighteenth-century poets who deserve mention: Saint-Lambert, Léonard, and Gilbert. Saint-Lambert (1717–1803), no great poet indeed, was highly praised by Voltaire, and he in turn spoke thus of Voltaire, placing him above Corneille and Racine:

Vainqueur des deux rivaux qui règnent sur la scène.
 His special interest to us is that he came strongly under English influence, and in 1769 published his principal work, an imitation of James Thomson's *Seasons*. His *Saisons* is by no means the equal of its original. Saint-Lambert is obsessed with the idea that he is bound on every possible occasion to draw a moral from the course of nature, and he is hampered by the consciousness that he is ploughing a lonely furrow. He frankly declares that while Thomson wrote for an audience that knew nature, and loved it, he is writing for one that knows it not, and regards it with indifference.

Léonard (1744–93), born at Guadeloupe, and thus a Creole like Parny, settled early in France. He began his poetic career unsuccessfully with a series of exercises in religion and philosophy. In idyllic, elegiac, and pastoral poetry, however, to which he turned, he won some popularity. But how strained, how anaemic, how insipid this sort of poetry tended to become in the latter half of the eighteenth century may be gauged from an example of his poems which still catches some readers' eyes:

(90)

THE Two STREAMS

Daphnis, who lost his lover dear,
 Told this sad tale to win a tear
 From those who blamed his loud lament:

CHANTICLEER

Mais qu'on n'ose prôner de sophistes pesans,
 Apostats effrontés du goût et de bon sens:
 Saint-Lambert, noble auteur dont la muse pédante
 Fait des vers fort vantés par Voltaire qu'il vante . . .
 Et ce lourd Diderot, docteur en style dur,
 Qui passe pour sublime, à force d'être obscur . . .
 Et ce froid d'Alembert, chancelier du Parnasse,
 Qui se croit un grand homme et fit une préface. . . .¹

But Gilbert is best remembered for a touching poem he wrote, in a moment of sadness, and which still survives in anthologies. Here is a version of it:

(91)

FAREWELL TO LIFE

I 've shown my heart to God, the God of innocence;
 He 's seen my contrite tears from far,
 Heals me of my remorse, arms me with constancy:
 For all who grieve His children are.

My scornful enemies have cried out in their wrath:
 'Die, and thy glory die with thee!'
 But, father-like, the Lord says to the heart He soothes:
 'Their hate thy sure safeguard will be.

'Thy dearest friends have caught their enmity from them.
 All play on thy simplicity:
 He whom thy hand has fed will sell thine image pure,
 Blackened by some foul calumny.'

'But God has heard thy groans, God to whom thou art bound
 By true remorse born of a tear,
 God who is ready still to pardon all mankind
 For weakness shown in mortal fear.'

'I will awake for thee pity, and justice too,
 That time, which cannot err, holds fast;
 Thy foes themselves will clear, by arts too finely spun,
 Thine honour which they hoped to blast.'

¹ His preface to the Encyclopaedia.

All praises be to God, who deigns to give me back
 Innocence, with a noble pride;
 To Him who wills to keep my ashes undisturbed
 And watch and wait my bier beside!

To life's great banquet I, a guest unfortunate,
 Once found my way, and I must die;
 Must die, and on the tomb, where slowly I arrive,
 . To shed a tear none will come by.

Farewell, fields that I loved ! and you, fresh foliage green !
 Ye woods, where happy exiles dwell !
 Ye heavens, man's tented roof, thou nature we adore,
 Farewell, for the last time farewell !

Ah ! may they live to see your sacred beauty long,
 Those friends, deaf when my farewells rose !
 May they die full of days, may mourners mourn their death
 And friendly hands their eyelids close.

The impression left by this poem, coupled with his early death in 1780, before he was thirty years of age, seems to have given rise to a legend, nursed by Charles Nodier among others, that Gilbert was a sort of French Chatterton, who died in poverty and neglect. There is probably no foundation for any such supposition. His hostility to Voltaire and the philosophers commended him to the Court and the Church, and from both he received pensions. His death was occasioned by a fall from his horse; after the accident he was carried to a public hospital, quite probably because it was the best place for one who needed a serious operation, on the faint chance of saving his life.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century did have the fleeting vision of a great poet, André Chénier, born in 1762, and guillotined in 1794. His fate was sadder than that of either Keats or Shelley; for tragic as was the early death of both of them, his was more tragic still, done to death as he was in the savage excesses of the Reign of Terror. The French Revolution was the awful but inevitable sequel to the Sun King's selfish splendour and extravagance, and the callous licentiousness of

the court of his degenerate great-grandson. There is a famous portrait by Boucher, fit artist to adorn such a reign, which represents Louis XV's notorious mistress, La Pompadour, in all her beauty of face and form, and all the preposterous magnificence of her attire. Art has here, as often, enshrined the vice of luxury. But with that vision of her in mind, contrast it with the vision of the viragos of the Revolution, who shrieked in frenzy around the guillotine, and would have torn her in pieces had she lived to encounter their fury. Her successor, indeed, the beautiful Madame du Barry, was guillotined in 1793.

André Chénier was perhaps the most to be lamented of all the victims of the Reign of Terror. He was of gentle birth; his father was consul-general at Constantinople, and his mother a Greek. For four years, 1787 onwards, he was attached to the French Embassy in London; on his return to Paris he was a moderate in politics, and did little to deserve his cruel fate, guillotined simply as a matter of the revolutionary routine. It is said that as his sentence was pronounced he touched his head and said: 'And yet there was something there!'

His early poems, idylls, eclogues, elegies, and the like, were steeped in the spirit of Greek literature of the Alexandrian Age, and though much of his work was left in a fragmentary condition there are passages to be found in it as lovely as many of Keats's poems. The *Iambes*, poems he wrote in the prison of Saint-Lazare while awaiting his execution, and which he had to leave unfinished, unpolished, and unrefined, are sterner stuff. Blazing with anger and indignation at his own fate, and the fate of many of his own friends, they hiss and stab like bullets, as Thomas Seccombe has said. Only two or three of his poems were published in his lifetime, or indeed in the eighteenth century at all, and it was not until 1819 that anything like a collected edition of his works appeared. He was thus in no sense a precursor of the Romantic revival, but the last and most harmonious, most colourful poet of the classical tradition. We know not, alas, what he might have become had he lived on, and caught the enthusiasm of the France renewed by Napoleon Bonaparte.

As examples of his poetry we offer first the version of a charming reminiscence of his father, entitled *La Flûte*, a version not in Alexandrines, but in ten-syllable verse, which seemed readily and smoothly to contain the poem:

(92)

THE FLUTE

The day comes back to me in tender thought
 When first the flute close to my mouth he brought,
 And, with a smile, lifting me near his heart
 Called me his rival, more than counterpart.
 He trained my prentice lips, still so unsure,
 To breathe a note harmonious and pure,
 In cunning hands took my young finger-tips
 Raised them and lowered, with half a hundred slips,
 And taught them thus, however small and weak,
 To close the stops, and make the wood-wind speak.

Next comes a version of one of his shorter classical elegies, *Clytie*:

(93)

CLYTIE

To Clytie thus my ghost: 'Farewell, Clytie, farewell!
 Art thou the one whose step has deigned hereby to dwell?
 Speak, Clytie, is it thou, or must I wait alway?
 Ah! if thou com'st not here alone at break of day,
 To think how short the time that I have lived for thee,
 To see thy lover's shade and speak a word to me,
 Elysium's peace will bring my heart but bitterness,
 Nor lightly, as before, earth on my bones will press.
 Whenever in this place cool airs at dawn's behest
 Come to caress thy lips, and flutter on thy breast,
 Weep, weep, 'tis I! O weep, adored one of my heart!
 It is my soul that dares from her high home depart,
 And on those lips of thine still loves to rest in bliss.
 Weep, open wide thine arms, and give her kiss for kiss.'

Then we offer a version of a lovely elegy on the death of a child:

(94)

ON A CHILD'S DEATH

A victim innocent, in this her home on earth,
 She only saw the spring, the one that gave her birth.
 Nothing is left of her save name and mystery,
 A memory, a dream, a form one cannot see.

Farewell, thou tender child our arms have clasped in vain;
 Farewell, in thy new home whence none returns again.
 We shall not see thee more, when clothed with ripening
 wheat

The summer countryside empties the village street;
 We shall not see thee more round the paternal nest,
 Where once thy hands and feet and limbs half bare caressed
 The grasses and the flowers wherewith the nymphs of Seine
 Engarland year by year the hillsides of Lucienne;
 Thy little carriage-wheels, a toy for thy delight,
 Guided by faithful hands that tend thee day and night,
 No more will leave their track by stream, or through the mead.
 Thy gaze, thy babbling tune, sweet language hard to read,
 No more to busy us will some new care invent.
 No more we'll hail with joy and cries of wonderment
 Efforts thy rosy mouth with stammering tongue may make
 To give again the sounds thine ears, too young, mistake.
 Farewell in thy far home where we shall follow thee,
 Whither thy mother's eyes e'en now turn jealously.

Finally comes an attempt to render one of his *Iambes*, written in prison, rude at times because unrevised, and almost inarticulate here and there through the rage that consumes the poet:

(95)

SAINT-LAZARE

As a last ray of light, last waft of zephyr's wings,
 Brighten a lovely day's decline,
 Even on the scaffold's step I 'll seek to tune my strings;
 Perchance the next turn will be mine.
 Perchance before Time's self, who marches round and round,
 On the smooth dial's face has set,
 Within the sixty steps whereby his course is bound,
 His foot that strikes the hour when met,
 The slumbers of the tomb will weigh my eyelids down.
 Ere from my lips imperfect falls
 My song, nor end is heard the unfinished work to crown,
 Perchance within these startled walls
 The messenger of death, the Shades' grim monitor,
 Escorted by his foul patrol,

Will waken with my name this long, dark corridor
 Where mid the crowd I wander sole,
 And polish bright my darts to meet the face of crime,
 Frail arms the just man to assist.
 Suddenly on my lips he may arrest a rhyme,
 With fetters bind me, wrist to wrist,
 And drag me through the crowds who throng to watch me go,
 Sad comrades in captivity,
 All of whom knew me well ere came the fatal blow,
 But who no more my face will see.

.

Ah, well! I 've lived too long. What pride in truth heart-whole,
 Of manly faith and constancy
 What blest examples dear to every good man's soul,
 What gleam of fortune come near by,
 What Judge to punish crime rising in majesty,
 What tears a noble grief lets fall,
 Of antique benefits what loyal memory,
 What sweet exchange at true love's call,
 Make worthy of regret men's habitat on earth?
 Pale fear's their god, of aspect fell.
 Despair! . . . Deceit! . . . Ah, me! cowards are we from birth,
 All, all. Farewell, this earth, farewell.
 Come death, come welcome death, and my deliverance give.
 Does then my heart, worsted in strife,
 Sink neath its load of ill? No, no, would I might live!
 Virtue sets store upon my life.
 An honourable man, victim of hate and fear,
 In prison cell, by the grave's side,
 Holds higher still his head, and speaks in tones more clear,
 Glowing with all a generous pride.
 If by God's will no sword shall from its scabbard leap,
 To glitter when I deal a blow,
 This other arm, the pen in ink and gall I steep,
 May help to serve man here below.
 Justice and truth, if words fallen from my lips sincere,
 Thoughts I have nursed in secrecy

Have never brought a frown upon your brows severe,

And if the match of infamy,

Atrocious laughter, or worse insult to endure?

Praise from a monstrous crime-tainted land

Have driven in your hearts wounds that are hard to cure,

Save me! Sustain a stout right hand

To hurl your bolts, a friend to render blood for blood.

To die, with arrows yet unspent!

Unpieced, untrampled on, unmortared in their mud

Those who our laws have souled and rent,

Cadaverous worms who feed on France stretched in her gory

Their victim! . . . O thou treasure rare,

My pen! Malice and wrath, horror, gods I adore!

Through you alone I breathe heaven's air,

Even as the burning pitch, hid in the torch's veins,

When shaken wakes a dying gleam.

I suffer, but I live. Far, far from all my pains,

Through you, hope in a rushing stream

Transports me. Without you, like poison purple-dyed

Chagrin's sharp tooth naught can withstand,

The oppression of my friends, the lying homicide,

Brass sceptre of success in hand,

Good men whom he condemns to loss of all, even life,

By shameful law of lawless men,

All had dried up my life, or driven their steely knife

Deep in my very heart. What then?

None would remain to win the heart of history

For all these just men done to death,

Console their widows, sons, their memory;

To check the abhorred brigands' breath

Before dark portraits drawn to show them as they stand;

To plunge down even into hell,

To seek the triple whip, whip for the Avenger's hand,

Now raised to serve these perverts well;

To spit upon their names, gloat o'er their suffering!

Come, stifle now thy bitter cry;

Suffer, heart big with hate, for justice famishing.

Thou, Virtue, weep, if I should die.

The Revolution with all its horror swept away for ever

absolutism in France; even the interludes of the first empire under the great Napoleon, of the second under his feebler great-nephew, and between them the short reigns of Louis XVIII, Charles X, and Louis Philippe, cannot conceal the fact that a nation conscious of itself was henceforward master in its own household, that the people were sovereign, and their ruler, whatever his designation, their nominee. Leading up to the Revolution was a national ferment inevitably occasioned by the oppression of the masses, and the miseries of their existence, and the restless desire for reform stirred up in the middle classes by Montesquieu's brilliant essays in political philosophy, the intellectual propaganda of Diderot and his band of collaborators, and the biting criticisms of Voltaire. But the most explosive personal force of all was Rousseau, the creator at once of romanticism and of the worship of nature, and, despite his moral weaknesses, one of the greatest of social reformers, the first chapter of whose *Social Contract* begins with the shattering sentence: 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.' It was the irony of fate that sent Rousseau to deal the final blow at absolute monarchy in France, for though this idol of the Revolution was a Swiss, born at Geneva in 1712, he was the descendant of a French ancestor who had emigrated from France in the sixteenth century.

The prodigious result to French literature, and to French poetry in particular, of the complete change in the conditions and the outlook of France brought about by the Revolution will be seen in the next chapters, treating of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that it was no mere sudden shock that brought about the radical change in literature and art, as well as in social and political conditions, which made a new age of the nineteenth century.

We have said enough in this chapter of the feverish intellectuality that marked the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, an intellectuality devastating in its criticism of the *ancien régime*, and not only critical but also in a measure constructive. And in the restricted sphere of poetry we have seen that the young poet, André Chénier, who perished by the guillotine, had begun to write poetry of a sort that pointed to a future he was not to see. Nor were the influences on French life and thought in the eighteenth century confined to France itself. During the later years of Louis XV's reign, and all through Louis XVI's, Paris

as the centre of fashion drew a constant stream of visitors to it from among the English aristocracy, and as an intellectual centre attracted many of the most prominent amateurs and intellectuals from our side of the Channel. Such men as Horace Walpole, Gibbon, David Hume, and Adam Smith found themselves there in an atmosphere stimulating or provocative. Also, from across the Rhine came from time to time reverberations of the great renaissance in philosophy, scholarship, and literature that marked the last half of the century in Germany.

The literary relations between England and France during the eighteenth century, previously not fully explored, have recently been exhaustively surveyed by Professor Green of Cambridge, in his volume entitled *Minuet: a Critical Survey of French and English Literary Ideas in the Eighteenth Century*. The title explains the character of a remarkable work. Professor Green is not carried away by a desire to exalt English influence on the development of the drama, poetry, or the novel in France, and to prove more than the facts warrant. Influence there was. Writers of eminence in either country were aware of what was being produced in the other. Shakespeare was known, Pope was known, and to others beside Voltaire Defoe was known, Richardson was well known and widely read, Thomson's *Seasons*, Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, all found French poets ready to adapt them, but the fundamental Frenchness of French literature remained, and was little affected. To take one extreme example: Prévost may well have known of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* before he wrote his *Manon Lescaut*, but how grotesque to suggest that the latter was in any sense an adaptation of the former!

Incidentally Professor Green does a great service in rendering full justice to Voltaire's eminence as a poet, and in the precise account he gives of Voltaire's attitude to Shakespeare, with whose plays his stay in London had familiarized him, an attitude not so bitterly prejudiced as has been popularly supposed. It was not, be it remembered, until after the revolution that Shakespeare's direct influence on French drama asserted itself; and, then, as will be suggested later, on the introduction, as it were, of Schiller.

In the nineteenth century one of the greatest of French poets did show Shakespeare undisguised devotion, viz. Alfred de

Vigny, whose fine adaptation of *Othello* for the French stage is a noble tribute to his hero. Of Shakespeare Vigny said : Il ne suffit pas d'entendre l'anglais pour comprendre ce grand homme, il faut entendre le Shakespeare qui est une langue aussi ; le cœur de Shakespeare est une langue à part. . . . It has been suggested that the influence of Shakespeare on the Romantic drama was exercised mainly through his follower, Schiller, who gradually subdued the form of his plays to rule, and so became as it were the mediator between Shakespeare and Racine. His dominant influence cannot be denied, and sufficient proof of this will be adduced later in this chapter.

But the attention of the present writer has been called by Mr. Preece to a very remarkable passage to be found in Chapter L of Dumas's *Impressions de Voyage*, which shows how shattering was the impact of authentic Shakespeare on Dumas, Berlioz and other young enthusiasts in the heyday of the Romantic movement in the nineteenth century. This passage calls for a full summary.

Dumas begins by describing how on entering his bedchamber in a Swiss chalet he found on the walls portraits of Talma and Mlle Mars, the great tragedians of their day. The sight of them recalled one of their great triumphs in a contemporary play. For three or four years, says Dumas, he had been tormented with the desire to write for the theatre; he had conscientiously studied the great French masters, and had a profound admiration for them; but he found it impossible to accomplish anything within the rules they had imposed upon themselves. He needed a new style of drama, more pliable in form, more free in movement, more true to nature in its details, to express the passions of a new age. He thought he saw something of what he wanted in the play in which Talma's and Mlle Mars's performance delighted him, but only such indications as the flight of birds and the seaweed floating on the waves that showed Columbus he was near land.

Six months later the English players arrived in Paris. Three years earlier they had been greeted at the Porte-Saint-Martin theatre with hisses and a shower of apple-cores. Now they were playing at the Odéon, and high society in Paris queued up to applaud Miss Smithson and Kemble. Till then, he confesses with shame, he had only known Shakespeare in Ducis's imitations.

He had seen Talma play Hamlet, and tragic as the actor was in a pale copy of the great original, the piece gave him but little pleasure. Thus he had some difficulty in persuading himself to go to see Hamlet played by Kemble, an actor of less repute than the great Talma. But he went, and of the excitement that soon visited him in the theatre his own words must speak:

'Il me serait difficile de raconter ce qui se passa en moi dès la première scène: cette vérité de dialogue dont alors je ne comprenais pas un mot, il est vrai, mais dont l'accent simple des interlocuteurs me donnait la mesure; ce naturel du geste qui s'inquiétait peu d'être trivial, pourvu qu'il fût en harmonie avec la pensée; ce laisser-aller des poses qui ajoutait à l'illusion, en faisant croire que l'acteur, occupé de ses propres affaires, oubliait qu'elles se passaient devant un public. Au milieu de tout cela, la poésie, cette grande déesse qui domine toujours l'œuvre de Shakespeare, et dont Smithson était une si merveilleuse interprète, bouleversait entièrement toutes les idées acquises, et, comme au travers d'un brouillard, me laissait apercevoir la cime resplendissante des idées innées.

'Enfin, quand j'arrivai à la scène où toute la cour réunie regarde la représentation fictive de cette tragédie dont la mort du roi de Danemarck a fourni le sujet réel, quand, après avoir vu le jeune Hamlet, dans sa feinte folie, se coucher aux pieds de sa maîtresse, jouant avec son éventail et regardant sa mère à travers les branches, je le vis, à mesure que l'intrigue infernale se déroulait, rendre progressivement à sa figure l'expression lucide et profonde d'une haute intelligence; lorsque je le vis ramper, comme un serpent, du côté droit au côté gauche de la scène, s'approcher de la reine la bouche haletante, les yeux étincelants et le cou tendu, et, au moment où, s'apercevant qu'elle ne peut plus supporter le spectacle de son propre crime, et qu'elle se trouble, et qu'elle se détourne, et qu'elle va s'évanouir, il se dresse tout-à-coup en criant: "Light! Light!" je fus prêt à me lever comme lui, et à crier comme lui: "Lumière! Lumière!"'

Of influences from Scotland as well as England on the development of the Romantic movement towards the end of the eighteenth century Ossian cannot be left out of account, for of books that are events Macpherson's compost or pastiche of Celtic

legend, published in 1765 as *The Works of Ossian*, is certainly one. It sent a thrill through Europe, and was rapidly translated into language after language. Its effect on the Romantic movement was tremendous, even greater in Germany, where Herder and the young Goethe welcomed it with almost hysterical enthusiasm, than in France. As for the standing of our novel in France in the early days of the Romantic movement it may suffice to mention that such was the esteem for Scott that when he died Hugo among other literary figures of the time wore mourning in honour of his memory.

But of our poets at the close of the century it was Byron who counted most as an influence on the Continent. He did not leave Lamartine or Hugo or Vigny untouched, but it was on Musset that he left the deepest impression, and it was the Byronic strain in Musset that provoked the violent reaction against him of Baudelaire, and others of a younger school. Baudelaire himself fell under the spell of Edgar Allen Poe, who fairly dominated him, as he did also Mallarmé for a time. But all through the next chapter will be found continual traces of English influence. Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve, Vigny, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé certainly knew English well, and four of them, Lamartine, Vigny, Laforgue, and Mallarmé, married English wives, while Berlioz married Henrietta Smithson, the Irish actress, who had so fascinated Dumas with her performance in *Hamlet*.

Of German influence on the Romantic movement it is possible to speak with certainty, and also with great definiteness, since the publication by Professor Eggli of his monumental work, *Schiller et le Romantisme français*. No one can go through the mass of evidence collected in its 1,310 pages without realizing how considerable German influence on French letters had become by the end of the eighteenth century, and how penetrating was that of Schiller in particular. The story is an interesting one, and deserves telling.

Long before the Revolution a knowledge of German literature had become familiar in cultivated circles in Paris. The cosmopolitan and versatile F. M. Grimm, German in origin, but French in culture, a close friend (for a time) of Rousseau, Madame d'Épinay, Diderot, and Catherine II of Russia, wrote in January 1762: 'German poetry and literature are becoming the fashion

in Paris, as English has been for some years.' And Condorcet, an unimpeachable Frenchman, is responsible for this statement: 'The peoples of Europe gazed with astonishment on German poetry, hitherto unknown, as offering them masterpieces worthy of rousing the jealousy of nations that had for centuries disputed among themselves the empire of letters.' Goethe's *Werther*, published in 1774, was a European portent, and the sobbing sentimentality of that tale of tragic love caught the spirit of the age. Three translations of it appeared in France within three years, and *Werther's* dress, blue coat, yellow vest, yellow hose, and top-boots, became a fashion and was worn even in Paris. Years later Sainte-Beuve described the book as 'the act of a conqueror and a high-priest of art.'

But from the point of view of the rise of the Romantic drama in France the epoch-making event was the performance at Mannheim in January 1782 of Schiller's *Robbers*. In 1785 an admirable French translation of it appeared in a series of German plays published in Paris, and there is no doubt that in Paris this new type of play, evidently inspired by Shakespeare, was much canvassed, and roused interest not only from the novelty of its form, ignoring as it did the unities of the old classical drama, but also from the radicalism of its ideas, for Schiller had learned much of his social philosophy from Rousseau. This is not the place to attempt a summary of Professor Eggli's massive argument, but it may be pointed out that among those touched to the quick by the *Robbers* of Schiller and other plays of his or Goethe's was Charles Nodier, to whom allusion is made in the next chapter; and it is impossible to believe that he did not from time to time hold forth to Hugo and other young Romantics gathered round him in his *cénacle* on the glories of both Goethe and Schiller.

Translations of Schiller, poems as well as plays, became almost innumerable, and borrowings from both, quite legitimate borrowings, are frequently to be detected, as, e.g., in the plays both of Hugo and Dumas. To deny as some have attempted to do, the importance of both German and English influence on the Romantic movement in France is absurd. The matter cannot be put more bluntly than it was by Dumas himself: 'The great literary shock that overturned the old edifice of our drama was administered to France by Germany and England.' As to the

means we may recall Charles Nodier's fine saying: 'The true revolutionary in literature is the translator.' Finally, we must not forget the tremendous effect of the propaganda carried on during the early years of the nineteenth century by that brilliant woman, Madame de Staél, whose famous book, *De l'Allemagne*, was published in 1813.

Of the efforts to find at the end of the eighteenth century new forms and means for dramatic expression a striking example can be given in the work of the prolific poet and playwright, Népomucène Lemercier, born in 1771. A sarcastic French critic has described him as gifted by nature with a restless disposition, and by his parents with a ridiculous name, and certainly both in his poetry and his plays he was always experimenting, and when he was good he was really very good, and when he was bad he was horrid. Such was his precocity that at the age of sixteen a play of his was performed at the *Théâtre français*, partly no doubt through the influence of his godmother, the Princesse de Lamballe, high in whose service his father was. His tragedy of *Ophis*, on an Egyptian subject, attracted the notice of Bonaparte when full of his Egyptian expedition, and Lemercier was on the best of terms with him until his independence of character was shocked by the establishment of the empire. Though his work hardly suggests it, Lemercier was a man full of charm, and Talleyrand spoke of him as the best talker of his time.

He wrote plays both orthodox and unorthodox, a few successful, the others utter failures. Of those which still tended to follow tradition the best and most popular was his *Agamemnon*, and of his new departures the outstanding one was *Pinto*. This is a remarkable play, well deserving of study, both for its own interest and its importance in the history of French drama. First played in 1799, it tells how the courage and resource of the humble Pinto succeeded in freeing Portugal from Spain in the revolution of 1640, and establishing his master, the Duke of Braganza, on the throne. Here is Lemercier's own account of the aim and object of the play: 'Mon but en composant cette comédie a été de dépouiller une grande action de tout ornement poétique qui la déguise, de présenter des personnages parlant, agissant comme on le fait dans la vie, et de rejeter le prestige, quelquefois infidèle, de la tragédie et des vers. Heureux si,

après m'être efforcé dans *Agamemnon* de prouver mon respect pour les lois de Melpomène, je pouvais ouvrir une route nouvelle au théâtre, où l'on suit trop souvent les ornières des chemins battus.'

Dumas himself, with all his eloquence, hardly said more in defining his purpose as a playwright; but Lemercier, though he followed up *Pinto* with his *Christophe Colomb* in 1809, which he wrote in verse and styled a *comédie Shakespirienne*, and which, quite undeservedly, was hissed off the stage, steadfastly opposed the new school. Elected to the Academy in 1810 he consistently stood out against the election of Victor Hugo, and it was by the irony of fate that after his death in 1840 Hugo stepped into his seat.

Nevertheless, when all has been said, and the effect of English and German influences on the development of the Romantic movement in France during the nineteenth century has been fully admitted, we are bound to admit as sound the French claim that all such foreign influences end by losing themselves in the great river which they as tributaries have helped to form.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

PART I

THE first half of the nineteenth century was marked by an outburst of poetry in volume, in richness, in variety, in vigour, in music, in sensuous charm, so remarkable as to make the whole century, throughout which the impulse was sustained, perhaps the golden age of French verse. At the end of the last chapter a brief indication is given of the causes that led not only to the political revolution at the end of the eighteenth century that brought down the monarchy in ruin, but also to a literary revolution that shook off the rules and the traditions that governed the Augustan Age, reintroduced the personal note, and set the poet free to write as he wished, on what he wished, and even to sing. It seemed as if the Pleiad rose phoenix-like, more splendid from its ashes.

The pioneer of the Renaissance was not a poet, but a prose-writer, the glorious, almost Falstaffian figure of Rabelais, and so the pioneer of the new movement at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries was not primarily a poet, but the great writer of prose saturated with poetic feeling, Chateaubriand, who dominated French literature all through the first empire, and was himself the inheritor of much of the spirit and style of Rousseau.

François-René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand, scion of a noble family, was born in 1768 at St. Malo. The picturesque features of his father's ancient château of Combourg and its immediate surroundings, and the feel of the remote and legendary Breton countryside, profoundly influenced, as in Renan's case long afterwards, the early life of a sensitive boy, and left their mark on him throughout his later years. He entered the army and, like Chénier, was not altogether unfavourable to the cause of the Revolution in its first stages, but its excesses soon shocked him,

and when his regiment was disbanded, he sailed to America, where the still unspoilt virgin forests, wild mountainous scenery, and what he saw, or heard, of the life of the Red Indians, stirred his romantic enthusiasm, as, in later years, did his travels in the east.

On hearing of the arrest of Louis XVI at Varennes in 1791, he returned to France, but the following year joined the band of royalist emigrants abroad. He was wounded while fighting on their side, and ultimately, after some thrilling adventures, made his way to London. There he lived in great poverty for several years, during which he made a close acquaintance with English literature. How close this was may be judged from the fact that he translated the whole of *Paradise Lost* into fine, dignified French prose, and wrote a long study of English literature, which, with all its attractive discursiveness, is well worth reading by those who enjoy the opportunity of entering into a talented foreigner's point of view.

Among his poems is an elegy in imitation of Gray's. The following extracts show how close he kept at times to the original, and where imitation amounts to translation how good it is:

Dans les airs frémissants j'entends le long murmure
 De la cloche du soir qui tinte avec lenteur.
 Les troupeaux en bêlant errent sur la verdure;
 Le berger se retire, et livre la nature
 A la nuit solitaire, à mon penser rêveur.

Souvent, ô laboureurs ! Cérès mûrit pour vous
 Les flottantes moissons dans les champs qu'elle dore;
 Souvent avec fracas tombèrent sous vos coups
 Les pins retentissants dans la forêt sonore.
 En vain l'ambition, qu'enivre ses désirs,
 Méprise et vos travaux et vos simples loisirs :
 Eh ! que sont les honneurs ? l'enfant de la victoire,
 Le paisible mortel qui conduit un troupeau,
 Meurent également ; et les pas de la gloire,
 Comme ceux du plaisir, ne mènent qu'au tombeau.

Qu'importe que pour nous de vains panégyriques
 D'une voix infidèle aient enflé les accents?
 Les bustes animés, les pompeux monuments
 Font-ils parler des morts les muettes reliques?

'Souvent nous l'avons vu, dans sa marche posée,
 Au souris du matin, dans l'orient vermeil,
 Gravir les frais coteaux à travers la rosée,
 Pour admirer au loin le lever du soleil.
 Là-bas, près du ruisseau, sur la mousse légère,
 A l'ombre du tilleul que baigne le courant
 Immobile il révoit, tout le jour demeurant
 Les regards attachés sur l'onde passagère.
 Quelquefois dans les bois il méditoit ses vers
 Au murmure plaintif du feuillage et des airs.
 Un matin nos regards, sous l'arbre centenaire
 Le cherchèrent en vain au repli du ruisseau;
 L'aurore reparut; et l'arbre et le coteau,
 Et la bruyère encor, tout étoit solitaire.
 Le jour suivant, hélas! à la file allongé,
 Un convoi s'avança par le chemin du temple.
 Approche, voyageur! lis ces vers, et contemple
 Ce triste monument que la mousse a rongé.'

ÉPITAPHE

Ici dort, à l'abri des orages du monde,
 Celui qui fut longtemps jouet de leur fureur.
 Des forêts il chercha la retraite profonde,
 Et la mélancholie habita dans son cœur.
 De l'amitié divine il adora les charmes;
 Au malheureux donna tout ce qu'il eut, des larmes.
 Passant, ne porte point un indiscret flambeau
 Dans l'abîme où la mort le dérobe à ta vue:
 Laisse-le reposer sur la rive inconnue
 De l'autre côté du tombeau.

Thus he set himself to spread the knowledge of English literature in France, a service which, as indicated in the previous chapter, Madame de Staël, another prominent figure in the

literature and politics of the time, had already performed for German life, letters, and thought. And throughout the century we shall see again and again signs of the influence of both England and Germany on developments in France.

Prose so eloquent as that of Chateaubriand is hard to match in any language. What he gave to prose was not only a more harmonious, more musical rhythm than hitherto known, but colour as well, so that whole passages in his *Génie du Christianisme*, his romances, the account of his travels in the East, and, above all, his wonderful memoirs, published after his death, seem to glow like the pictures of some great painter. The title of those memoirs, *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, is in itself an epitome of literary Romanticism. We have in him a vague, brooding melancholy, a passion for the picturesque in nature, a sensitiveness to the haunting charm of the medieval past and its ruined monuments, a waywardness of thought and fancy, all bearing the impress of his own Byronic personality, seen with his eyes or fused in his brain, itself intoxicated, to adapt a well-known phrase, with the exuberance of his own self-centred egotism. Critic after critic has pointed out that there are few notes struck by the great Romantic poets that are not to be found in him.

In the politics of his time Chateaubriand, despite his efforts, failed to play a successful part. He gained the favour of Napoleon, but on the murder of the Duc d'Enghien refused to serve him longer; and all through his later life, which did not end until 1848, he was not quite able to reconcile his liberalism with his legitimist sympathies. But after Napoleon's fall it was perhaps a pamphlet of his that paved the way for the restoration of the Bourbons.

A minor, but very useful, part was played at the outset of the Romantic movement by Charles Nodier, born at Besançon in 1780. After sowing his wild oats as a youthful Jacobin he became suspected of sympathy with persons who were secretly helping royalist emigrants. His father, the Mayor of Besançon, placed him for safety in charge of more than one distinguished scholar, and thus he got the opportunity of becoming a considerable, though discursive, scholar himself. Greek, English, German, natural science, philology, and bibliography were the subjects of his study, too wide a field for him to reach pre-eminence in any one of them.

After a wandering life he settled in Paris, and was appointed in 1824 librarian of the Arsenal, a treasure-house of fine manuscripts and books. He made his house a centre for the young enthusiasts of the new movement, Vigny, Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Musset, Dumas, and the rest, who were able to draw liberally on his stores of knowledge and enjoy his genial Bohemianism. As Musset gaily sang:

Alors, dans la grande boutique
Romantique,
Chacun avait, maître ou garçon,
Sa chanson.

Nodier's *Contes fantastiques*, short stories in prose, are among the best in form and content published in a century rich in brilliant examples of the kind. But he also wrote poetry, and one most charming little poem of his deserves to live as an exemplar, not only for its beauty, but also for the simplicity and modernity of it, which show very clearly how at the beginning of the nineteenth century we are in a new age, and an age that has not yet passed away:

(96)

THE YOUNG GIRL

How fair she was when plainly drest at dawn
She conned the budding marvels on earth's breast,
Watching her bees in their ambrosial nest,
And wandering round the flower-encircled lawn.

And fair she was amid the starry gleam
Shed by the ball-room's lustres round her head,
When, decked with sapphires blue or roses red,
She frolicked in the dancers' eddying stream.

Fair, too, behind the shelter of her veil,
That fluttered as she wooed the cool night-air,
While we, at gaze afar, stood silent there,
Happy to see her in the starlight pale.

Yes, she was fair with all the charms that glow
When tender thought and vague, sweet hopes are met;
Love only lacked to make her fairer yet!
But hush! . . . across the fields her mourners go.

CHANTICLEER

Striking proof of Nodier's flair for what is new, and fine, in art as in literature is furnished by the fact that he was one of the very first, either at home or abroad, to recognize the greatness of Constable, the English landscape painter. He bought his 'Hay Wain,' and had it exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1823, with results on the course of French painting that are now among the commonplaces of the art historian.

There are yet two important names to be mentioned before we are launched on the high tide of Romanticism. The first is Béranger, a man of humble origin, born in Paris in 1780. In his early youth he assisted his aunt in running an inn in Péronne, and was later apprenticed to a printer. He grew up a sturdy republican, though the glamour of Bonaparte attracted him, and never lost its spell over him. With but a smattering of literary education, poor in health, and in dire poverty, he strove unsuccessfully to make a living by writing, but in 1804 was rescued from penury by the generosity of Lucien Bonaparte.

He concentrated on the writing of songs bacchanalian, amatory, satirical, and even political, and his fame among the populace spread rapidly throughout France, his songs being passed from hand to hand by one enthusiast to another. But not until 1812 did a collection of them appear in print. More than once his political songs brought on him fine and imprisonment, which he underwent with patience and even good humour. In the revolution of 1830 he took a prominent part, but, after the fall of the Bourbon dynasty, he refused to receive any favours for himself from the Orleanist, Louis Philippe, though he secured a pension for the aged and penniless Rouget de Lisle, author of the *Marseillaise*. His immense popularity grew year by year, and in 1848, after the flight of Louis Philippe, he was elected by a huge majority to a seat in the Constituent Assembly, which he could not refuse, but which he resigned as soon as he could, and though he still continued to write, and, as always, deliberately, he lived on quietly, beloved by the people and honoured by many of the great, until his death in 1857.

His character was amiability itself, his generosity unstinted, and his songs developed more and more as he went on in life an ardent sympathy with the poor and outcast, even a tragic note being struck now and again. His poetry is so personal an expression, and, though very carefully studied, so apparently artless, that to

give any representation of it in English verse is quite impossible. And the reason may well be that not having had a classical education he was not, like most of the great French poets, in the classical tradition which has rendered it possible for those in the same tradition to give versions of their works with some relationship in form and expression to the original. Here, with its rollicking refrain, is the first verse of his most famous song, the ever-memorable *Roi d'Yvetot*:

Il était un roi d'Yvetot
 Peu connu dans l'histoire :
 Se levant tard, se couchant tôt,
 Dormant fort bien sans gloire,
 Et couronné par Jeanneton
 D'un simple bonnet de coton,
 Dit-on.
 Oh, oh, oh, oh, ah, ah, ah, ah !
 Quel bon petit roi c'était là !
 La, la.

Here is a verse from *Roger Bontemps*:

Posséder dans sa hutte
 Une table, un vieux lit,
 Des cartes, une flûte,
 Un broc que Dieu remplit,
 Un portrait de maîtresse
 Un coffre et rien dedans ;
 Eh gai ! c'est la richesse
 Du gros Roger Bontemps.

Here is a verse from *Les Souvenirs du Peuple*, where the old grandmother in her cottage tells her excited grandchildren how more than once she saw the great Bonaparte:

Mes enfants, dans ce village,
 Suivi de rois, il passa ;
 Voilà bien longtemps de ça :
 Je venais d'entrer en ménage.
 A pied grimpant le coteau,
 Où pour voir je m'étais mise,
 Il avait petit chapeau
 Avec redingote grise.

CHANTICLEER

Près de lui je me troublai,
 Il me dit: Bonjour, ma chère,
 Bonjour, ma chère.
 — Il vous a parlé, grand'mère!
 Il vous a parlé!

And here is a verse from his *Gipsy Song*, the final refrain of which is *Le bonheur, c'est la liberté*:

Voir c'est avoir. Allons courir!
 Vie errante
 Est chose enivrante.
 Voir c'est avoir. Allons courir!
 Car tout voir c'est tout conquérir.

M. Hippolyte Babou has quoted Lamartine's description of Béranger, not as a violinist, but as 'the fiddler who, whenever he drew his bow across the strings, drew it across millions of human hearts to strike a note of exaltation or of pity.' It is as a great writer of popular songs that Béranger has been jealously admitted to the canon of French poetry. In a poem published after his death he tells with characteristic modesty how he settled down to song-writing. His early ambition was to write an epic, then he thought a tragedy would take less time, and still less time an ode. Even that was too exacting a task, and so he settled on song-writing: 'J'ai rêvé d'aigle et m'éveille pinson.'

M. Jubinal, the editor of Rutebeuf's works, writing more than fifty years ago, described Rutebeuf as the Béranger of his time. The older poet was the greater poet, in range as in accomplishment, but both were popular poets, born of the people, both had something of the pamphleteer in them, and M. Jubinal's remark does serve in a measure to bridge the gulf that separates the thirteenth century, the great century of the trouvères, from a precursor of the Romantic movement in the nineteenth century. It will be suggested later in this book that one of the most brilliant of the moderns, Laforgue, will be found to strike now and again the same native note as Béranger, and catch the accent of his folk.

The other name that has to be mentioned before we take our plunge into the Romantic movement is that of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *la grande Marceline*, as Charles Bonnier, some-

time Professor of French at Liverpool, termed her. Madame Desbordes-Valmore was born at Douai in 1786, and died in 1859. She had not an easy life; for much of it she was engaged in a hard struggle to keep her family; but she wrote poetry that has led most critics to claim for her at least equal rank with Louise Labé as the leading poetess that France has produced. There are those who have blamed her for carelessness in composition, and for writing passionately when the fit was on her, instead of waiting to transmute into poetry passion remembered in tranquillity. The truth is that, like Louise Labé in the days of the Pleiad, Madame Desbordes-Valmore was always herself, and wrote as herself. The personal note is always there, and her reward has been the tributes of the great poets of her time to her poetry precisely because of its sincerity.

What one of these has said of her is worth quoting because he, none other than Charles Baudelaire, was poles asunder from her in mind, in the form and content of his work, and in morals. Of her poetry he said: 'I like it, probably and precisely, because of the violent contradiction that my whole being finds in it.' Art may fail her at times, he agrees, but 'a sudden beauty, unexpected, that cannot be equalled, suddenly confronts you, and lo! you are irresistibly transported to the height of the poetic heaven. Never was any poet more natural; never was one less artificial. No one has been able to imitate that charm, because it is altogether original and native to her. . . . Her song keeps always the delicious accent of the woman's voice; no borrowing, no factitious ornament, nothing but "the eternal feminine."'

Here is a version of a very simple piece of hers, a poem of childlike sentiment, that has been enshrined in the *Oxford Book of French Verse*:

(97)

A LITTLE GIRL'S PILLOW

Dear little pillow, soft and warm beneath my head,
Filled with the nicest down, and white, and made for me!
When thunder, wind, or wolf would frighten me in bed,
Dear little pillow mine, how well I sleep on thee!

Many, many children, poor, naked, motherless,
Homeless and pillowless, have nowhere soft to sleep;